

Abraham Cowley's Reputation in England

THÈSE COMPLÉMENTAIRE

PRÉSENTÉE A LA FACULTÉ DES LETTRES
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS

PAR

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Ancien Elève de l'Ecole Normale Supérieure

Agrégé de l'Université

Professeur d'Anglais au Lycée de Toulouse



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HENRI DIDIER, EDITEUR

4 et 6, Rue de la Sorbonne

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PREFACE

The works of Abraham Cowley present the student of English Literature with a twofold riddle: why did they at one time attract extravagant praise, and at another deep contempt? Through what chain of vicissitudes did they pass before reaching their present humble station?

This book aims at nothing more than answering the second question. It deals with the historical side of the problem; the biographical and critical aspects have been studied elsewhere¹, and an explanation has been arrived at, through an analysis of the true nature of his work, of the reasons *why* Cowley's reputation underwent such changes. It has been thought that to know *how* these changes came about would not prove devoid of interest, and deserved a close investigation.

In the following pages, therefore, the history of Cowley's reputation has been traced step by step, from its sudden blaze of glory, in Cowley's own time, through its slow decay, to the comparative obscurity in which it now rests. Critical estimates have of course afforded the main basis for this study, eminently embodying as they do, in each period, the ruling tastes of the age. Yet they have been supplemented and controlled, whenever possible, with other sources of information, since this book intends not only (though primarily) to define the changes in Cowley's fortunes as occasioned by the changes in doctrines, but also to obtain an exact notion as to Cowley's true standing among the public at large — which professional critics do not always faithfully express —, and his possible influence upon his brother-poets. So that use has been

1. In my book : *Abraham Cowley, sa vie , son œuvre*. Paris, 1931.

made of such undisputable proofs of an author's popularity or neglect as those given by editions, or the testimonies coming from amateur writers, and poets, in the shape of allusions, borrowings, and imitations. This enquiry, though faintly outlined in many of the notices devoted to Cowley, and partially effected by Professor A. H. Nethercot, had not yet received the thorough investigation and comprehensive treatment it deserves.

The evidence here collected does not obviously presume to be exhaustive. It may however claim, with some degree of certainty, to contain, for each period, the most significant and helpful material. Besides, it must here be stated that this inquiry has been limited to a history of Cowley's reputation in England (or rather in English-speaking countries, since the part played by United States criticism in the last stage of our review has been of first rate importance). A minor writer, such as Cowley, cannot hope to attract attention, much less exert any kind of influence outside his own country. A few foreign allusions or judgments have been retained as specially interesting, mostly as emphasizing the English standpoint, but no attempt has been made to pursue a systematic search for mentions of Cowley on the Continent.

In the task of gathering information for this book, I have received much help from the articles of Professor A. H. Nethercot on the reputation of the « metaphysical poets » at various stages, and particularly from his review of Cowley's reputation from 1660 to 1800, which has proved most valuable, owing to the wealth of references it contains. I have also great pleasure in thanking Miss M. Johnston for collecting much useful material for me when I could not do it myself. And lastly I owe special acknowledgements to Professor René Huchon, who supervised my work with his usual care and kindness.

Toulouse, March 1931.

J. L.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. — The Age of Sprat.....	1-21
I. <i>Cowley's reputation during his lifetime</i> , 1-12. — The rising star. — Incomparable Mr. Cowley.	
II. <i>His death</i> , 12-21. — Public testimonies. — Sprat's Account. — Cowley and his contemporaries.	
CHAPTER II. — The Age of Dryden.....	23-58
I. <i>Cowley's readers</i> , 23-36. — Editions. — Allusions. — Borrowings and imitations.	
II. <i>His critics</i> , 36-48. — Enthusiastic praise. — Beginnings of neo-classical criticism.	
III. <i>Dryden and Cowley</i> , 48-58. — His evolution. — Cowley's standing in 1700.	
CHAPTER III. — The Age of Addison and Pope.....	59-92
I. <i>Cowley's readers</i> , 59-70. — Editions. — Allusions. — Borrowings and imitations.	
II. <i>His critics</i> , 70-87. — XVIIIth century taste continued. — Neo-classical reaction. — The neo-classical choice.	
III. <i>Pope and Cowley</i> , 87-92.	
CHAPTER IV. — The Age of Johnson.....	93-126
I. <i>Cowley's readers</i> , 93-101. — Editions. — Allusions. — Borrowings and imitations.	
II. <i>His critics</i> , 101-118. — Bp. Hurd's revival of Cowley. — Degrees in discrimination.	

CONTENTS

III. <i>Johnson and Cowley</i> , 118-126. — His analysis of Cowley's Work. — Cowley's standing in 1800.	
CHAPTER V. — The Nineteenth century. — I. The Romantic Age.....	127-147
<i>Introduction</i> , 127-131.	
I. <i>The Eighteenth Century continued</i> , 131-140. — His readers. — His critics.	
II. <i>The Romantics and Cowley</i> , 140-147.	
CHAPTER VI. — The Nineteenth century. — II. The Victorian Age.....	149-169
I. <i>Cowley's readers</i> , 149-154. — No editions. — The artists and Cowley.	
II. <i>His critics</i> , 154-169. — Victorian criticism. — Traditional discrimination. — Awakening of interest.	
CHAPTER VII. — Cowley redivivus.....	171-204
<i>Introduction</i> , 171-172.	
I. <i>His readers</i> , 173-174. — Editions. — Allusions.	
II. <i>His critics</i> , 174-204. — How to group them. — Objective criticisms. — Appreciative criticisms : a sentimental revival. — The new attitude : an intellectual revival. — Cowley as he now stands.	
Conclusion.	205-211
I. <i>Cowley's readers</i> , 205-207.	
II. <i>Cowley's critics</i> , 207-211.	
Index.	213-221

CHAPTER I

THE AGE OF SPRAT

I. - Cowley's reputation during his lifetime

Fame, according to Cowley, only comes to poets after their death. They are doomed to live unknown, or ignored¹. Yet he himself proved a brilliant exception to that rule, for he enjoyed, even in his lifetime, the most unmitigated applause.

Indeed, success rewarded his very first literary efforts. In a later preface he has told us of the favourable reception his *Poeticall Blossomes* had met with in 1633: « ...they were then looked upon as *commendable extravagance* in a boy », he says modestly, and he speaks of the « several *Editions* » they had already passed through, « which is a longer *Life* then uses to be enjoyed by *Infants* that are born before the ordinary *terms*... »². The graceful little book was actually issued a second time in 1636, some new pieces being added, and the « *blossomes* » grown into a more ambitious « *Sylva* ». In the following year, Henry Seile brought out a third edition.

Though the author of these poems was a mere boy, they could not be looked upon as boyish, and Cowley's chamber-fellow in Trinity College, Robert Cresswell, thought them worthy the peru-

1. Cf. for instance *The Complaint*, st. 8, I, p. 440, or the poem to Lord Broghill, st. 2, I, p. 407 [The edition of Cowley's Works used throughout this book, unless when otherwise stated, is that of A. R. Waller (The Cambridge Classics, 1905, 1906)].

2. Preface to the volume of 1656, p. 9.

sal of no less a personage than Lord Falkland ³. The University of Cambridge voiced their admiration through Richard Crashaw's lines « *Upon two greene Apricockes sent to Cowley by Sir Crashaw* » ⁴. Wittily comparing the belated fruit and the young poet's precocity, Crashaw exclaims :

Twas only Paradice, 'tis onely thou,
Whose fruit and blossomes both blesse the same bough...

and, having described him as :

Young Master of the Worlds Maturitie,

he concludes :

Take them, and me in them acknowledging,
How much my summer waites upon thy Spring.

Cowley did not disappoint the hopes he had aroused. His two comedies, *Loves Riddle*, and *Naufragium Jocularé*, definitely placed him in 1638 among the University Wits, and Prince Charles's enjoyment of *The Guardian*, in march 1642, made him favourably known at Court. He was not yet thirty (1647) when his *Mistress* ranked him on a level with Waller, the master of the amorous lyric.

Literary circles began to show their appreciation of his talent. Thus, the compiler of *Witts Recreations, selected from the finest fancies of Moderne Muses* enriched the collection, in his 1650 edition, with three poems taken out of *The Mistress* ⁵, henceforth to be found in the successive reprints of 1654, 1663, and 1667.

A small detail may help us to realise how far his reputation then extended. When he was arrested, on the 12th of April 1655, the *Weekly Intelligencer*, announcing the event, wrote of him as : « memorable Mr. Abraham Cowley, more famous by his pen than his sword ». Though the expression was meant as a jibe at the royalist, the poet's fame was none the less, through it, acknowledged publicly.

3. Cf. Cresswell's letter to Lord Falkland, may 12 1638 preserved in the *Rawlinson mss.*, Poet. 246, f. 26 (It is to be found partly quoted in the present writer's book : *Abraham Cowley. Sa vie. Son œuvre*, p. 61).

4. *The Poetical Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. A. R. Waller, p. 175. They were first published in *The Delights of the Muses*, 1648.

5. These are : *Love's Discovery*, the *Heart-Breaking*, and *Silence*.

It reached its climax when, in the volume he published in 1656, he gave forth the bloom of his manhood and genius ⁶. No title of glory could now be denied him. He stood, in the eyes of his contemporaries, not only as the greatest English poet then living, and one of the greatest England had ever known, with Shakespeare and Spenser, but even as the worthy successor and rival of the supreme masters of the craft, the Ancients. The soul of Virgil and Homer was felt to breathe anew in the *Davideis*, that of Pindar in the *Odes*, that of Horace, Ovid, Anacreon, in the more familiar lyrics.

*
**

This enthusiasm found a faithful echo in the raptures with which Thomas Sprat, then a young Oxonian and a dashing versifier, greeted the coming of the book into the Bodleian library ⁷.

Let all the common rout of Books stand by,
The common people of our Library;
Let them make way for Cowley's leaves to come,
And be hung up within this sacred room...

Surely, Cowley was led by divine inspiration :

Cowley ! what God did fill thy breast,
And taught thy hand to indite ?
..... or else at least,
What Angel sate upon thy pen when thou didst write ?...

His verse shines with a « bright immortal flame », such as Prometheus stole from Heaven; it flows with « the Majestick sweetness » of Arion's song charming the fish and waves; or of Amphion's breathing life into stones; it has so raised the English language

6. William London, in his *Catalogue of the most vendible Books...* for 1657 advertised it under the following heading : « Poems. Mr. Cowley. Severall love verses. Poems, Misselains, Pindarique odes, and a Sacred Poem of the troubles of David. fol. »

7. « Upon the Poems of the English Ovid, Anacreon, Pindar and Virgil, Abraham Cowley, in imitation of his own Pindaric Odes. » The poem was first printed in Dryden's *Miscellany*, 1716 (vol. IV, p. 296). It is to be found among the *Rawlinson mss.* in the Bodleian library (Rawl. C. 556. f. 17...). It also exists in another ms of the same library (E. Poet. e. 4. f. 49...), wrongly entitled « On the death and memory of the English Ovid... », but the first two stanzas are omitted.

that it is grown more elegant than « the round-mouth'd Greek », more poetical than Spanish, French, or even Italian.

No poet was more daring in his attempts :

Thy Soul hath gone through all the Muses tracks
Where never Poets feet were seen before...;

boldness divine, where truth triumphed over fiction, and the Christian religion at last conquered modern poetry.

This general introduction to Cowley's genius is followed by an analysis of the various parts of the volume : the *Miscellanies* show such wealth in their diversity that they look like a milky way of gems; the *Mistress* speaks of love so sublimely that it might prove a pattern for Angels :

Thy love is on the top, if not above Mortality,
Clean and from corruption free...;

the *Pindarics* give Pindar a new lease of life, making him greater and brighter than he ever was in his own odes. Last comes the *Davideis*. But here Sprat feels compelled to stop, for :

None but the priest himself doth use
Into the holiest place to goe.

These strenuous efforts at writing up to the wit and audacity of his hero evince, on the part of Sprat, a sincere if immoderate admiration — such admiration as prompted, in more sober wording, the poem of Lord Broghill which we have been fortunate enough to bring to light : « *To Mr. Cowley on his Davideis* », gratefully acknowledged by Cowley in his « *Ode, Upon occasion of a copy of Verses of my Lord Broghills* »⁸. The key-note of the whole poem is sounded in the opening paragraph where Broghill hails with delight Cowley's choice of a religious subject for his epic :

When to the world thy Muse thou first didst show,
It caused in some wonder and sorrow too,
That such vast parts God unto thee had lent,
And yet they were not in his praises spent,

8. It is preserved among the mss belonging to the Marquis of Bath who has most obligingly favoured us with a copy.

But those which in this sacred Poem looke
 Now find thy Blossoms for thy Fruit they tooke.
 In differing Ages differing Muses shine
 Thy Green the sense did feast, thy Ripe the mind.
 In this are met the most admired extremes,
 The best of Poets and the best of themes.
 Writing for Heaven thou art inspired from thence,
 Thy subject thus become thy influence.
 Scripture no more the impious ear shall fright,
 Now the best duty is the best delight.

The same admiration prevails through the analysis of the *Davideis*, and Broghill — who seems to have been specially pleased with the description of the friendship between Jonathan and David, and the invocation to Music —, concludes with the regret that Cowley left his undertaking unfinished :

But why dost thou thyself and us so wrong
 As to begin and not conclude thy song,
 For though thy Hero by thy verse is grown
 Much greater now than when he filled the Throne,
 Yet place him there, for you whose lofty strain
 So well laments his wrongs, shouldst sing his Reign.

Even before the *Davideis* was printed, fragments were being circulated in manuscript by Cowley's devotees. Dorothy Osborne, writing, in the summer of 1654⁹, to her future husband Sir William Temple, sent him one of these :

... It is only a piece taken out of a new thing of his. The whole is very long and is a description of, or rather a paraphrase upon the friendship of David and Jonathan. Tis I think the best I have seen of his, and I like the subject because it is that I would be perfect in...

Having gained the favour both of frivolous persons through his *Mistress*, and of serious-minded ones through the moral earnestness displayed in the later volume, Cowley was one of the « lions » of society, and, despite his usual reserve, he had to submit to public curiosity. He has himself told us how, when he walked about town, people would recognize him, and so gaze at him that he was fain to run away¹⁰.

9. June 18, according to S. A. Parry. *Letters from Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple, 1652-1654*.

10. *Of Obscurity*, II, p. 398.

No wonder that Mrs. Katherine Philips, renowned as « the matchless Orinda », should welcome him in her Society of Friendship. It is not known whether Cowley was given a resounding name to match the Antenors, the Palaemons, or the Silvanders, but one thing is certain : their mutual regard. Cowley proclaimed his admiration for the poetess in his pindaric ode : « *On Orinda's Poems* », and in her turn Orinda expressed her esteem in her ode : « *Upon Mr. Abraham Cowley's Retirement* » calling him « the mighty Cowley », « the man whom all Mankind admir'd »¹¹.

She was favoured with the latest born from his brain, and so could forward to her dear friend Poliarchus (Sir Charles Cotterell, who, by the way, had known Cowley in France) the lines which the poet had just translated from Virgil¹². She was not long either in reading his books, when they appeared in print : for the *Cutter of Coleman Street* had scarcely been published, when she alluded, in another letter to Poliarchus dated October 13, 1663, to Cowley's preface¹³.

When the first two books of *Gondibert* were issued, in 1651, stoutly supported by the prose manifestoes of Davenant himself and Hobbes, and heralded in verse by Waller and Cowley, it was felt that such a revolutionary poem, setting at defiance all traditional rules, could not remain unanswered. The partisans of orthodoxy launched forth, in 1653, two pamphlets designed to ridicule it. Both contained a poem in which Davenant's sponsors were mentioned, but in both Waller and Cowley escaped unhurt. One for instance, said :

I am old Davenant with my fustian quill...
 Waller and Cowley, 'tis true, have praised my book
 But how untruly
 All they that read may look;

11. *Poems by the most deservedly admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda...* London, 1678 (Saintsbury's *Minor Caroline Poets*, vol. I, p. 575).

12. *Letters from Orinda to Poliarchus*. Published by Bernard Lintot in 1705 (p. 68). The letter is dated Dublin, August 20. 1662. The lines of Cowley were to be included, first in the *Verses written upon Severall Occasions*, 1663, and later in the *Essays*.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 194. She could not, she said, trust to the popular appreciation of *Pompey*... « being of Mr. Cowley's mind, that the creatures of the Theatre are governed by fortune as well as all other things »...

Nor can old Hobbes
Defend me from dry bobbs... 14.

He was called, in 1658, « poetarum hujus seculi princeps », by the editor of his ode on *Christ's Passion* 15.

Scientific men like Worthington and Hartlib, discussed upon the nature of his *Proposition for the advancement of Experimental Philosophy* as soon as it was advertised in the News-Book, and speculated upon its probable results 16.

Two « virtuosi », talking in verse of literary matters, while treating Denham and Davenant somewhat harshly, were unable to mention his name without linking it to some eulogistic epithet: « great », « sweet », and alluding to « the wondrous heights » his muse reached in its flight 17.

The inquisitive Pepys went to see his play, the *Cutter of Coleman Street*, on December 16, 1661, and had his latest book given him by Cowley's brother 18. Evelyn exchanged visits, messages, and gifts, with him, and took care to place in front of his *Kalendarium Hortense*, the essay by way of letter which Cowley had dedicated to him, *The Garden*.

Sir William Temple wrote from Brussels to Lord Lisle in August 1666, evidently remembering Cowley's poem *The Tree* :

I wish I could give you some trouble of another kind, by sending

14. *Certain Verses written by severall of the Authors friends; to be reprinted with the second edition of Gondibert*. London. Printed in the year 1653. The other, much to the same effect, was printed in : *The Incomparable Poem Gondibert vindicated from the Wit-Combats of four Esquires, Clinias, Dametas, Sancho and Jack Pudding*. Printed in the year 1653 (Isaac Disraeli has drawn attention to these poems in his *Quarrels of Authors*).

15. In a collection of Oxford writings where his translation of T. Masters's Ode on the Crucifixion was printed : « Eadem (i. e. Masters's Ode) anglice reddita, Authore (Poetarum hujus Seculi Principe) D. D. Abrahamo Cowley » (To be found collected with : D. Henrici Savillii Oratio... Aliaque doctiss. virorum opellae posthumae... Oxoniae... 1658).

16. Letters from Dr. John Worthington to Samuel Hartlib : April 1, May 28, August 22 1661, and from Hartlib to Worthington, April 2 1661 (In : Worthington's *Miscellanies*... London 1704, p. 243, 258, 269; and Bp. Kennet, *A Register and Chronicle, ecclesiasticall and civil*... London, 1728, p. 870).

17. *Iter Boreale*. With large additions of Severall other Poems, being an exact collection of all hitherto extant. Never before published together. The Author. R. Wild. D. D. London, 1668.

18. This was the *Verses written upon Severall Occasions* (18 November 1663).

you a little Spanish Mistress from hence, whose eyes might spoil your trees, and burn up all the green walks at Sheen ¹⁹.

Such testimonies of admiration and esteem were not idle compliments. Cowley knew the supreme satisfaction of gathering disciples around him. Of course his influence gained strength and impetus when his complete works lay before the wondering gaze of the next generation : he was for a long time after his death, even as Spenser had been to him, a poet's poet. But, though he died too young to relish this fame fully, he lived long enough to enjoy some of it.

Thomas Sprat and Katherine Philips were his earliest pindaric disciples. The latter chose the irregular ode to congratulate Cowley upon his retirement. As to Sprat, he deliberately followed his lead, and became his most enthusiastic, if not very successful pupil. When he attempted, in 1659, to describe the plague of Athens, he did it « after incomparable Dr. Cowley's Pindarick Way », and in truly pindaric prose confessed his fears and hopes in an epistle to his friend Walter Pope :

... I have much reason to fear the just indignation of that excellent Person (the present ornament and honour of our Nation) whose way of writing I imitate... I hope that renowned poet will have none of my crimes any way reflect on himself; for it was not any fault in the excellent musician that the weak bird, indeavouring by straining its throat, to follow his notes, destroy'd herself in the attempt ²⁰.

The Davideis was responsible to a great extent for the *Paraphrase upon the Psalms of David* by Samuel Woodford. From the author's foreword it may be gathered that the poems were the immediate outcome of the plea Cowley had made for religious poetry in his 1656 preface. And Samuel Gardiner, in a commendatory poem on the book, explained :

The sacred harp, which lay unstrung...
Cowley took up, and with an artful stroke

19. *Memoirs of the Life, Works, and Correspondence of Sir William Temple, Bart.* By the Right Hon. Thomas P. Courtenay. In 2 vols. London, 1836, I, p. 250.

20. *The Plague of Athens which hapned in the second year of the Peloponnesian Warre.* First described in Greek by Thucydides; then in Latin by Lucretius; now attempted in English, after incomparable Dr. Cowley's Pindarick way. By Thomas Sprat. London, 1659.

One lesson play'd; one lesson did provoke
Your tuneful Soul...

Another adept of Cowley's was Thomas Shipman, who, in a piece called « *Gratitude : some grateful Acknowledgements to that most excellent Poet, Mr. Abraham Cowley* », thanked Abraham for praising him, as hyperbolically as Cowley himself had thanked Lord Broghill :

Henceforth, my Muse, more boldly claim the bays,
Ennobled now by Cowley's generous praise.
Apollo here has silver'd o're thy shades...

In the Muses Empire Cowley, to Shipman's mind — an opinion well worth noticing — only had two rivals, Waller and Donne; but Cowley towers over them :

Donne's judgment, fancy, humour, and his wit,
Strong, searching, happy, and before ne're hit,
Gives him a fair pretence to climb the Throne;
But Waller rather stops than plucks him down.
Rich he appears, his courtly vesture grac'd
With golden similes all over lac'd,
But Cowley (like the infant of the sun)
Out glitters Waller, and ev'n dazzles Donne.
Both of'em, to Augustus, leave the Field;
Like Lepidus and Anthony, they yield.
He triumphs ! Their triumph'racy of rays
Unite in Cowley and compound his blaze ²¹.

Even the greatest poets of the Age expressed in an unmistakable manner their admiration for Cowley's genius.

Dryden was deeply influenced, as we shall see, by the « darling of his youth ». Mr. Margoliouth has pointed out, in his edition of *The poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, several striking resemblances between the love-poems of Marvell and Cowley's ²².

21. Our attention has been drawn to this poem by a manuscript note of Hazlewood bound with his copy of Jacob's *Poetical Register* in the British Museum (vol. II, pt. 2, p. 251) : « Thomas Shipman, in the collection of poems by him entitled *Carolina*, has one called : *Gratitude*. 1667 : some grateful acknowledgements to that most excellent Poet, M. Abraham Cowley. »

22. Cf. chiefly, p. 218, 222, 223, 224, 228... The comparison was first made by Mr. Margoliouth in the *Saturday Review*, June 7, 1919, in an article on « *Marvell and Cowley* ».

Milton according to his widow, said that the English poets he approved of most were Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cowley²³. Indeed it may be safely surmised that one of the determining reasons why he chose to turn his *Paradise Lost* into an epic poem was the example offered by the *Davideis*. It seems ludicrous nowadays to consider Milton as an imitator of Cowley. Yet many exterior resemblances, many common themes and notions, can be detected, which prove that Milton, when writing the *Paradise Lost*, constantly bore Cowley's epic in mind²⁴.

At every step we find new evidence of Cowley's eminence. He was even given what may be considered the highest proof of popularity: he was « anatomized » in a burlesque collection set together by Thomas Jordan in 1658: *Naps upon Parnassus*²⁵. A commendatory poem: « *To his ingenious friend the authour, on his incomparable Poems* » reviews a long list of famous poets, finding them all inferior to the author. Of Cowley he says:

Cowley's alack's too plain; his Davideis,
But fit for boyes to read, like Virgil's Enæis;
And for his Mistress, and his other Poems,
Anacreontique and Pindarique theames,
They have no method in'um, and are not worth
One pin to kindle fires, and set on hot broth...

The comic intention does not conceal the respect due to Cowley, and the linking of his name with Virgil's is characteristic enough.

He shared moreover with Cleveland, his rival in fame at the time, the distinction of having a whole poem devoted to him. Cleveland was charged with indulging in obscure and long, unintelligible words, and called « the Muses Metaphysick reader »²⁶.

23. In Thomas Newton's edition of *Paradise Lost*. 2 vols., 1749 (I, p. 50).

24. Cf. for instance: *Dav.* III, l. 393, and *Par. Lost*, I, l. 292; *Dav.*, II, l. 501, and *P. L.*, I, l. 393. See Rudolf Kirsten's Dissertation: *Studie über das Verhältnis von Cowley und Milton*, 1899.

25. *Naps upon Parnassus. A sleepy Muse nipt and pincht, though not awakened. Such voluntary and jovial copies of Verses, as were lately receiv'd from some of the Wits of the Universities, in a frolick, dedicated to Gondibert's Mistress by Captain Jones and others...* London, 1658.

26. *Upon Mr. John Cleveland, my quondam Chamber-fellow*. This is no doubt one of the earliest, if not actually the earliest instance we know of the use of the word « metaphysic » applied to the poetry of the Seventeenth Century, long before Dryden used it in his *Discourse on the Original and Progress of Satire*, 1693.

A pindaric ode — his own weapon turned against him — dealt with Cowley in the same vein, humorously objecting to his loftiness of purpose and subtle thought :

His fancy in black-art mourning owns the name
Of a dark lanthorn'd dungeon to a flame.
Whilst I the letters and the clear sense finde,
My weaker eye can't reach the Soul behinde.
So that by reverence my head is bow'd,
Thinking of Juno clothed in a cloud...²⁷.

Soon after the Restoration, when he laid himself open to satire by writing his *Complaint*, the anonymous successor of Suckling, in the new *Session of the Poets*, was far less malicious to him than to most other poets, and seemed more sad than ironical when he stated :

Savoy-missing Cowley came into the Court,
Making apologies for his bad play;
Every one gave him so good a report,
That Apollo gave heed to all he could say;
Nor would he have had, 'tis thought, a rebuke,
Unless he had done some notable folly;
Writ verses unjustly in praise of Sam Tuke,
Or printed his pitiful Melancholy.

More unpleasant to Cowley no doubt was the fact that the seventeenth Century Grub street scribblers and publishers were not slow to realize the value of his name on a title-page, as a means of ensuring the sale of their wares. As far back as 1642, while Cowley was still in residence at Cambridge, a broadside entitled *A Satyr against Separatists, or the Conviction of Chamber-preachers and other Schismatickes contrary to the Discipline of this our Protestant Religion*, was brought forward with the signature « A. C. Generosus », which might be construed : « Abraham Cowley, gentleman »²⁸. In 1648, a more ambitious poem : *The Foure Ages of England, or, The Iron Age*, took shelter under his full name : « written by Mr. A. Cowley », so that he was compel-

27. On the ingenuous poet Mr. Cowley. *A Pindarique Ode*.

28. It was issued on November 8, according to a manuscript indication on the British Museum copy.

led, in the preface of his next book, to disclaim it publicly²⁹. In spite of his protest, the successive reprints of the pamphlet in 1675 and 1705 were still offered as Cowley's, and in the 1705 edition the publisher, after mentioning the renewed interest of the 1648 satire, viewed in the light of contemporary events, insisted that the name of Cowley would « recommend it to the Ingenious ».

His own books were not safe from piratical publishers, and Herringman declared that he was forced to issue the *Verses written upon Severall Occasions* for fear of unauthorized and inaccurate versions³⁰.

But these were the small inconveniences attendant on greatness. The fact remains that, almost as soon as he began writing, fortune favoured him, and never forsook him. His reputation, established early, became firmly rooted and never ceased growing. No coterie, but universal and spontaneous applause raised him to the rank of « prince of the poets »³¹.

II. - His death

His death was felt as a national loss. The press announced it solemnly. In the *London Gazette*, for instance :

Whitehall. August 4. Yesterday in the evening the body of Mr. Abraham Cowley, who died the 28 past, was conveyed from Wallingford House to Westminster Abbey, accompanied by divers persons of Eminent Quality, who came to perform this last office to one who had been the great ornament of our nation, as well by the candour of his life, as the excellency of his writings.

His burial in the Abbey gathered round him, as a supreme

29. Cf. Preface to the volume published in 1656 (I, p. 4). Besides the *Iron Age* itself, two other poems were included in the volume : a discourse *To my Lord Lieutenant of Ireland*, and the *Satyre against Separatists*. Another spurious work of the same kind was given out as Cowley's, as late as 1819, by Sanford, in his *Works of the British Poets*, vol. VI. It is *The Character of an Holy Sister*, a religious pamphlet. Grosart also included it in his 1881 edition.

30. « Most of these Verses, which the Authour had no intent to publish, having been lately printed at *Dublin* without his consent or Knowledge, and with many, and some gross mistakes in the Impression, He Hath thought fit for his justification in some part to allow me to reprint them there. » Henry Herringman.

31. Cf. n. 15.

homage, all that was best in court and town. Evelyn has soberly but graphically described it :

3rd August. Went to Mr. Cowley's funeral, whose corpse lay at Wallingford house, and was thence conveyed to Westminster Abbey in a hearse with six horses and all funeral decency, near a hundred coaches of noblemen and persons of quality following; among these, all the wits of the town, divers bishops and clergymen. He was interred next Geoffrey Chaucer and near Spenser ³².

Let us notice this universal attendance. The court and the town, the brilliant and merry « *virtuosi* » as well as the graver sort of men, loved and admired him, though no doubt for different reasons. We shall see that this train will gradually dwindle down, the « *wits* » falling off one by one, drawn towards other idols, the clergymen remaining faithful to the last to the author of the *Davideis* and the *Odes* . But this was to take place in the distant future. To the generation of 1667, the epitaph which described Cowley to the world, as the Pindar, the Virgil, the Horace of the English nation, hyperbolic though it was, sounded true. He stood indeed before them as « *deliciae, decus, desiderium aevi sui* ».

He was even honoured with an epitaph from the King, who, on hearing of his death, exclaimed that « Mr. Cowley had not left a better man behind him in England ». Of greater value, because certainly more sincere, were the regrets expressed some days later, in Herringman's shop, by Dr. Ward, the bishop of Winchester, and Dr. Bates, when Pepys overheard them « mightily lamenting » his death « as the best poet of our nation and as good a man » ³³.

His fellow-poets lamented his loss as was befitting. Whether they knew him personally, or merely through his works, Denham, Scarborough, H. Newton, Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, Thomas Higgons, Thomas Flatman, Samuel Wesley, not to mention his devoted translators, Nahum Tate and Aphra Behn, exalted his genius and deplored his untimely fate ³⁴.

32. *The Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn* (ed. Bray, p. 297).

33. Pepys. *Diary*, August 12, 1667 (Globe edition, p. 540).

34. The commendatory poems were first published, part in Herringman's, 1688 edition, part in Harper's Second Part in 1689. The only ones signed are those of John Denham, Thomas Higgons, Thomas Flatman, and Samuel

Of outstanding literary merit was Denham's Elegy, of peculiar clumsiness, Newton's. But all, good and bad alike, displayed a sincere reverence for the man and the poet. Denham bewailed his early death : Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher, lived long enough to enjoy their fame,

But cursed be the fatal Hour
That pluck'd the fairest, sweetest Flower
That in the Muses Garden grew...

Newton assured him of immortality :

Your worth secures you from all Rivals now;
He that is highest can fear none below.
Their threatenng number cannot cloud your light,
But makes your splendour to appear more bright,
And their eclipse doth make them seem to be
But as additions to your victory.

Thomas Higgons concluded his poem in the same dithyrambic vein :

As long as Petrarch's, Cowley's Name shall reign;
'Tis but his Dross that's in the Grave,
His Memory Fame from Death shall save;
His Bays shall flourish, and be ever Green,
When those of Conquerors are not to be seen ³⁵.

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But by far the most complete and acute eulogy Cowley received was the *Account* Sprat wrote ³⁶. In it we find, not only a living portrait, but a sympathetic analysis of the work, and through it we can understand what his contemporaries so highly appreciated

Wesley. Two are anonymous, but one (the first in vol. I) was later reprinted in John Nichols's *Selection* as Orrery's. The other may be the work of Scarborough. That of Henry Newton was, as far as we know, never printed, and is to be found among the *Rawlinson Mss* in the Bodleian Library (Engl. Poet. c. 4).

35. William Speede, in his *Epigrammata Juvenilia...* published in 1669, included one « In obitum Dignissimi Viri, A. Cowley Armigeri, Poëtae celeberrimi ».

36. *An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley. Written to Mr. M. Clifford* (Printed in front of the 1668 edition of Cowley's works).

in his verse; not only the degree of their admiration, but the motives that fostered it.

What appears most striking at first is the stress laid by the biographer on the character of Cowley, not as an author, but as a man. Indeed, Cowley's personality seems to have fascinated those who came near him, as much as his talent impressed them. The *London Gazette* insisted, as we have seen, on « the candour of his life » before praising « the excellency of his writings ». The clergymen Pepys heard at Herringman's were lamenting his loss « as the best poet of our nation and as good a man ». John Evelyn, when he was first told the sad news, on August 1, linked together in his affliction « that incomparable poet and virtuous man ». The King himself, in his epigrammatic epitaph, dwelt upon his moral worth.

Reading through Sprat's eloquent sketch of his character, we understand his power of attraction. But this charm died away with him, a faint flavour of it only lingering in some nooks and by-places of his works, and the only ground for critical estimates has of course been his printed work. What then did Sprat and his contemporaries find in Cowley's books, that they could look upon him as the best poet of the Age ?

Sprat discovered in the *Mistress* « the whole Passion of Love... inimitably described, with all its mighty Train of Hopes, and Joys, and Disquiets », and he added rather shrewdly :

Besides this amorous Tenderness, I know not how in every Copy, there is something of more useful knowledge very naturally insinuated, and everywhere there may be something found to inform the Minds of wise Men, as well as to move the Hearts of young Men, or Women.

The *Pindaric Odes* were remarkable for their extreme variety, and « the irregularity of the number », far from being a fault, gave them new beauties :

The frequent Alteration of the Rhime and Feet, affects the Mind with a more various Delight, while it is soon apt to be tir'd by the settled Pace of any constant measure.

Yet, continued Sprat, in a most characteristic manner :

That for which I think this inequality of Number is chiefly to be preferr'd, is its near Affinity with Prose... this loose, and unconfin'd

Measure has all the Grace, and Harmony of the most confin'd. And withal, it is so large and free, that the Practise of it will only exalt, not corrupt our Prose...

In his translations of « many difficult Parts of the noblest Poets of Antiquity », Cowley has also been « wonderful happy » showing a genius equal to that of every one of his models. But nowhere did his genius shine brighter than in his epic, *Dauides*. Though, owing to his composing it very young, « in some few places, there is more youthfulness, and redundancy of Fancy, than his riper Judgment would have allowed », yet « it is a better Instance and Beginning of a Divine Poem, than I ever yet saw in any Language ».

The Latin poems are a most extraordinary performance, since in them, « he has expressed to admiration all the Numbers of Verse, and Figures of Poesie, that are scatter'd up and down amongst the Ancients ». He particularly excelled in the familiar Epistles after the fashion of Horace.

And this led Sprat to express his admiration for the letters of Cowley, which he has so prudishly kept from us. We sorely regret not having direct testimonies of « the native tenderness and innocent gaiety of his Mind ». As to the *Essays*, Sprat was content to explain how Cowley, intending them « as a real Character of his own Thoughts, upon the Point of his Retirement », wrote them with « little curiosity of Ornament », « in a lower and humbler style than the rest, and, as an unfeigned Image of his Soul should be drawn, without Flattery ». Obviously these essays, in his eyes, did not matter much. Cowley's titles to fame rested on the more exalted ground of his poetical raptures and such was, to be sure, the universal contemporary opinion.

In one respect, however, Sprat represented only part of that opinion. A churchman, he could not but insist upon the moral and religious side of Cowley's achievements, and point out his preference for such poems as the *Pindaric Odes* and above all the *Dauides* : « in other Matters his wit excell'd most other Mens : but in his Moral and Divine Works it outdid itself ». This was not unduly stressing the depth of Christian — we might even say puritan — feeling in Cowley's nature, and there was a great deal of truth in the assertion that « in other lighter kinds of Poetry, he chiefly represented the Humours and Affections of others; but

in these he sate to himself, and drew the Figure of his own Mind ».

Sprat therefore felt he must apologize for the space *The Mistress* took in Cowley's works, and excuse him for having written at such length on subjects so lacking in weight and moral purpose. The reason he found was that Cowley had indulged in those nimble fancies when young, and that he had made through them his apprenticeship for his later and graver themes. On this point most of his seventeenth century readers would no doubt have demurred, for *The Mistress* was to stand for a good many years as one of the pillars on which Cowley's Temple of Fame was erected.

In every other respect, they would have heartily agreed with him, especially when he emphasized the versatility of the poet's genius and wit :

The Variety of Arguments that he has managed is so large, that there is scarce any Particular of all the Passions of Men, or works of Nature, and Providence, which he has pass'd by undescrib'd.

And the variety of treatment was, in his eyes, as excellent as the variety of « argument » was surprising. Whether in familiar lyric and satire, or in philosophical and heroic poetry :

... he still observes the Rules of Decency... To all these matters that are so wide asunder, he still proportions a due Figure of Speech, and a proper Measure of Wit.

Fertility of invention, and a supreme power of adaptation, such were, according to Sprat, the main features of Cowley's poetry. His wit consisted above all in the combination of great agility of mind with sound discrimination. An unbounded wealth of ideas, fancies, images, such was the final impression left by his verse upon his readers, a suggestion that, on any theme, when he stopped, « it was in his power to have said much more ». Then they wondered at Cowley's self-mastery, at the sort of self-denial which he constantly seemed to practise :

His fancy flowed with great speed, and therefore it was very fortunate to him, that his Judgment was equal to manage it. He never runs his Reader nor his Argument out of Breath. He perfectly practises the hardest Secret of good Writing, to know when he has done enough.

This statement seems now rather paradoxical, and it is no doubt

that which, in Sprat's *Account*, most needs qualification. It was not long before an authoritative voice, no less a voice than Dryden's, raised an emphatic protest against it. But it is the more characteristic of the period and its tastes, that it could be brought forward so unhesitatingly.

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Indeed Cowley, more than any other seventeenth century poet, seemed designed, both by the constitution of his mind and his literary ambition, to satisfy in every respect the immense majority of his contemporaries. He truly acted as their representative in the field of letters, and they loved him accordingly.

He gave them what they asked, and managed to gratify their contradictory desires. He offered them first the quintessence of metaphysical subtlety. By its deliberate hunt after novelty, his wit expressed the growing intellectual restlessness. It was no longer the Elizabethan enthusiastic quest of a beautiful form. The joy of purely artistic creation had died away; it had been replaced by a longing for spiritual creation. Words, and images, and rhythms, no longer existed for their own sake, but only as far as they aptly embodied a meaning or a shade of meaning. Not the senses, but the intellect, now predominated. Donne had been, of course, the supreme master of this mood, but Cowley proved in many ways his disciple, and to the men of the age, the disciple was vastly superior to the master. For they wanted passion no more, nor sensibility, and Donne's individualism, his intensity in thought and phrasing, had grown alien to them. What they found, and so much relished in Cowley, was an imagination grown intellectual, an enthusiasm born of the mind and not the heart, a self-mastery proving the conscious use of reason. Even his wildest conceits were truly flashes of reasoning. A solid basis of thought underlay their extravagant fabric. Rhetoric had taken the place of lyricism in his verse.

And, though still eager for « metaphysical » analyses, the age of Cowley aimed at rationalism. Its most characteristic achievement was the foundation of the Royal Society with its whole-hearted adoption of the experimental method advocated by Bacon. Did not the conceits of Cowley proceed from the same spirit ?

Were they not, all things considered, experiments in thought? No doubt, the readers of 1660 found in his subtle discoveries, in his pursuit of hidden resemblances in ideas or symbols, precarious and excessive though they might sometimes be, in his paradoxical union of contraries, the full satisfaction of their intellectual curiosity.

From a purely formal point of view, their restlessness seemed to result in a longing for utter freedom. They felt impatient of any bounds, they rejected traditions. Having too long fed upon the flowing strains of the Elizabethan Muse, the exquisite choice of words and images, the regularity of rhythms, the harmony of versification of Spenser and his disciples, they welcomed the naturalness of Cowley's vocabulary, his use of every day phrases, even of technical terms. As Sprat justly pointed out, « he took them [his words] as he found them made to his Hands; he neither went before, nor came after the Use of the Age ». They did not find too harsh the asperities of his verse, his broken rhythms, his many contractions, but considered that he gained in vigour what he lost in smoothness. They grew enthusiastic when he was bold enough to throw off, in his *Pindarics*, all metrical restraints, leaving far behind the stale moulds into which poetry had so long been cast, the stanza and the couplet. In Sprat's own words :

... The frequent Alteration of the Rhime and Feet affects the Mind with a more various Delight, while it is soon apt to be tir'd by the settled Pace of any one constant Measure.

But freedom, to them, ultimately meant truth. They vindicated the right to overthrow conventions, only to reach the reality these conventions hid. If the *Davideis* proved such a success, it was largely because Cowley had built it upon the truest of foundations, the Bible. And Sprat preferred the *Pindarics* for their « near Affinity to Prose », that is to say because they bridged the gulf between the two means of expression, and would help to make prose more dignified and poetry more useful :

... The practise of it [the Pindaric way of writing] will only exalt, not corrupt our Prose; which is certainly the most useful kind of writing of all others : for it is the style of all Business and Conversation.

In the name of truth also Sprat defended the homeliness of

Cowley's Latin epistles, and the humbleness of his *Essays*.

Thus were made manifest in the poet's works the confused tendencies of his Age; tendencies making for a deep change in the national mood, but only half-conscious, hesitating, preserving in their tentativeness much of the old order of things. For, while praising the lifelike simplicity of Cowley's familiar style and of his metrical irregularities as well, Sprat found nothing to object to in his wit — though it meant the very reverse of simplicity and directness — and even exalted the strength with which his judgment corrected his fancy !

Yet, even in Sprat's *Account*, eulogies had to yield some little space to an apology of Cowley. For some minds were apparently evolving before the rest out of the transitional stage, towards a conscious form of neo-classicism, and by these Cowley, the representative man of the transition, had already been criticized.

Not to speak of the attack levelled at *The Mistress* on moral and religious grounds by stern moralists (Sprat had an easy task of it when he asserted that Cowley had never intended to write « lascivious and prophane verses ») ³⁷, Cowley was reproached, as we learn by Sprat's own vindication of his hero, with not caring enough for « the Choice and Elegance of his words », and with roughness in his versification. Contractions were specially objected to. The same critics would of course be displeased, in his *Pindarics*, at « the Boldness of his Metaphors and length of his Digressions », and « disgusted » by « the Irregularity of the Number », so that Sprat had an answer ready for them. Perhaps his insistence upon the moderating influence of Cowley's judgment over his wit was also due to his anticipating similar objections on this point. As early as 1663 he had protested, in a letter to Sir Christopher Wren, against the upholders of « smoothness »: if we were to judge of a poem by its smoothness only, he said, « then it may be Quarles might come in competition with Cowley » ³⁸.

37. The Rev. E. Elys was to publish in 1670 a pamphlet entitled: *An exclamation to all those that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, against an Apology written by an ingenious person, for Mr. Cowley's lascivious and prophane Verses*. By a dutiful son of the Church of England.

38. *Parentalia: or, Memoirs of the family of the Wrens... chiefly of Sir Christopher Wren...* London, 1750, p. 255.

Such attacks, though hardly developed as yet, are interesting in that they show the existence, at the Restoration, of a definite body of opinion determined to censure even the most revered names, according to the principles which had already been put to the test in Waller's and Denham's works : purity of language, smoothness and regularity in versification. We can here discern the seeds which grew into the neo-classical criticism of Cowley as a poet.

But these criticisms were few and timid, mere hints at some imperfections in his works, faint murmurs drowned in the chorus of applause of a whole generation, which, but for Sprat's conscientious plea, we should not hear at all. They only dealt, moreover, with details, and their authors would not have dreamt of questioning Cowley's genius. The nature and trend of his wit escaped all censure. His conceits roused in his admirers a wondering delight. He remained, and was for many years to remain the great, the incomparable Mr. Cowley, the pattern of poets, the favourite author of the reading public, such as Sprat had shown him to be.

Yet, even in the next thirty years, these murmurs will find a voice, and the reputation of Cowley will enter into its critical stage. For the psychological rhythm which had already begun swaying, from the imaginative license of the Renaissance towards a strictly rational order, was irresistibly to gain strength and power during the last third of the century, until it reached its culmination in the neo-classicism of the Augustan Age. This long and steady preparation for the acceptance of a rule, which Cowley had partly felt himself, but to which the main body of his poetical work was a complete stranger, could but have disastrous effects on his reputation. For, among the most convincing eulogies, doubts would needs creep in as to his excellence, doubts which would inevitably grow into open censures, and, as inevitably, new poets would arise, in their turn claiming the admiration of their age.

Neo-classicism was bound to find fault with Cowley for the very reasons that made him a favourite with his contemporaries. Yet one of the main aspects of the period we are now going to study is, perhaps, less the rise of neo-classical criticism concerning Cowley, than the difficulties it met on its way, the shyness with which it was expressed, and, as it were, its stunted growth. For indeed, towards 1700, we shall find Cowley's fame apparently as firm and bright as we now leave it.



CHAPTER II

THE AGE OF DRYDEN

To obtain an accurate view of the heights Cowley's reputation reached between 1667 and 1700, it is useful to examine the most material and unexceptionable proofs offered by the public demand for his books. New editions and reprints were innumerable.

According to the poet's last wish, Sprat collected in 1668 what he had published in 1656 and since, and what he had « designed for the press », in two volumes; the English writings in a folio, the Latin ones in an octavo volume¹. The latter came out a second time in 1678. As to the English Works, they knew a glorious career. A second edition was called forth in the very next year, 1669, and a comparison of the errata in different copies has shown that there were at least three issues of this edition². Nor

1. *The Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley*. Consisting of those which were formerly printed : and those which he Design'd for the Press, now Published out of the Authors Original Copies. London. Printed by J. M. for Henry Herringman at the Sign of the Blew Anchor in the Lower Walk of the New Exchange. 1668.

Abrahami Couleij Angli, Poemata Latina. In quibus continentur Sex Libri Plantarum, viz. duo Herbarum, Florum, Sylvarum. Et unus Miscellaneorum. Londoni, Typis T. Roycroft, Impensis Jo. Martyn, apud insigne Campanae extra Locum vulgo dictum Temple Bar. MDCLXVIII.

2. Cf. A. H. Nethercot. *The Reputation of Abraham Cowley*. 1660-1800 (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, vol. XXXVIII, p. 603). — It should here be stated that in collecting material for this chapter and the two following ones, I have derived much benefit from this article. Yet it should also be made clear : 1° That most of the data presented in these chapters had been gathered before it came to my knowledge, so that it only supplemented my previous research work. — 2° That the new facts brought forward by Mr. Nethercot have always been carefully checked by direct reference to the works themselves, and most often re-shaped to fit a somewhat different purpose.

did the fortunes of the book stop here. Herringman had to print a third edition in 1672, a fourth in 1674, a fifth in 1678, a sixth in 1680, a seventh in 1681, an eighth in 1684, an unnumbered one in 1688, and a ninth in 1700.

Besides, from 1681 onwards, another publisher, Charles Harper, set to supplementing Herringman's text. He first published a « Second Part » to the Works, called *Juvenilia*, including the *Poeticall Blossomes*, *Loves Riddle*, and *Naufragium Jocularis*³, then, in 1689, a « Third Part », consisting of the English translation of the *De Plantarum Libri Sex*⁴. Meanwhile Herringman had added, in 1688, « several Commendatory Copies of Verses », and, in 1693, the *Cutter of Coleman Street*. So that practically the whole of Cowley's extant works were now collected.

Those which had hitherto escaped notice were issued separately: *A Poem on the late Civil War*, in 1679; and the satire *The Puritan and the Papist*, in 1682⁵.

Knowing the advertising value of anything signed by Cowley, authors eked out their own productions by fragments from his works, and publishers used them as pamphlets. In 1666, Alexander Brome, translating Horace, borrowed three odes from Cowley. In 1683 Francis Willis did the same for the *Anacreontics*⁶. J. Crosley inserted at the end of a collection of *Poems upon divers Occasions*, the ode Cowley had addressed to his friend Evelyn in *The Garden*, with this ingenuous foreword :

3. *The Second Part of the Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley*. Being what was written and published by himself in his younger years, and now reprinted together. The fourth edition. London. Printed by Mary Clark for Charles Harper, at the Flower de Luce in Fleet Street, and Jacob Tonson at the Judges-Head in Chancery Lane near Fleet Street, 1681.

4. *The Second and Third Parts of the Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley*. The second containing what was written and published by himself in his younger years, and now reprinted together. The sixth edition. The third containing his six Books of Plants : viz. the first and second of Herbs, the third and fourth of Flowers, the fifth and sixth of Trees. Now made English by several Hands. With necessary tables to both Parts, and several Poems in praise of the Author. London. Printed for Charles Harper, at the Flower de Luce over against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet Street, 1689.

5. *In Wit and Loyalty reviv'd in a Collection of some smart Satyrs in Verse and Prose on the late Times*. By Mr. Abraham Cowley, Sir J. Birkenhead, and the ingenious Author of Hudibras... London. Printed for W. Davis, 1682.

6. *The Poems of Horace*, consisting of Odes, Satyres, and Epistles, rendered in English Verse by several Persons... London..., 1666.

This following poem coming by Chance to my hands, I took the double boldness to print it, and affix it here : which will be, I hope, no prejudice to either author ⁷.

The sixth book of *Plantarum* « Englished », appeared in 1680, and was issued again in 1683 ⁸. In 1688 Cowley took an indirect part in the pamphlet war raging between Whigs and Tories with the portrait of Cromwell he had drawn in the *Discourse* ⁹. Evelyn's *Kalendarium Hortense* had reached, by 1690, its seventh edition, and the author modestly attributed its success to the presence of Cowley's *Garden* as a preface to his book ¹⁰. The *Elegy on Sir Henry Wotton* was added in 1670 to Walton's *Life of the diplomatist* ¹¹.

Not only did all cultivated persons make a point of buying his stately folios, and reading his poems, but the fashion also set in to sing them. Musicians readily turned them into songs. In 1668 William King brought forth a volume : *Poems of Mr. Cowley and others*, in which, out of twenty four songs, sixteen were Cowley's ¹². On the third of September 1680, John Evelyn received the visit of Signor Pietro, « a famous Musician, who had been long in Sweden in Queen Christina's Court; he sung admirably... and had set to Italian composure many of Abraham Cowley's pieces, which show'd extremely well » ¹³. These songs were published in

7. J. Crosley. *Poems upon divers Occasions. With a character of a London Scrivener*. London, 1667.

8. *A Translation of the sixth Book of Mr. Cowley's Plantarum*. Being a Poem upon the late Rebellion, the happy Restoration of His Sacred Majesty and Dutch War ensuing. London, 1680.

An Heroic Poem upon the late Horrid Rebellion, His Majesties Happy Restoration; and the Magnanimity and Valour of his Royal Highness James Duke of York in the late Dutch War. Wherein He exposed His Royal Personn to the greatest Dangers, for the Safety and Interest of this Nation. London, 1683.

9. *The Definition of a Tyrant, by the learned and loyal Abraham Cowley* (published by the present Lord Bp. of Rochester) in his *Discourse concerning the Government of Oliver Cromwell* (This is the passage beginning : « I call him a Tyrant, who... »). In *A fifth Collection of Papers relating to the present Juncture of Affaires in England...* London, 1688.

10. *The Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn*, ed. Bray, p. 688.

11. *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, and Mr. George Herbert*. Written by Izaak Walton... London, 1670. After the *Life of Wotton* comes : *An Elegie on sir Henry Wotton, writ by Mr. Abraham Cowley*.

12. *Poems of Mr. Cowley and others. Composed into Songs and Ayres...* By William King..., 1668 (All the poems, fifteen in number, were taken from *The Mistress*, save for David's Song to Michol).

13. *The Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn...*, p. 381.

that same year, and a prominent place was again given Cowley in the collection ¹⁴. The great musician Henry Purcell set several pieces from *The Mistress* and the *Anacreontics* ¹⁵; other musicians, such as Henry Bowman, followed his example ¹⁶, and John and Henry Playford, in the numerous collections they issued, frequently drew from his poems.

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These unmistakable tokens of Cowley's popularity are fully borne out by what we might call speaking proofs : allusions to his works, borrowings, imitations, which may be discovered scattered here and there in contemporary writings.

Even before reaching printed books, we find them in manuscript records. These are specially interesting as they show the active influence Cowley exerted on the minds of his contemporaries. His work was then truly dynamic. We do not mean to speak here of manuscripts proper, though they are fairly abundant ¹⁷, but of

14. *Songs set by Signior Pietro Reggio*, 1680 (The title-page is missing in the British Museum copy). The poems, no less than thirty three in number, are taken from Cowley's *Mistress* and the *Anacreontics*.

15. For instance : *Honour* (*Choice Songs and Ayres...* 4th book, 1683, and *Orpheus Britannicus*, 1698); *The Rich Rival* (*The Theatre of Musick*, 2nd book, 1685); *The Thraldome* (*Orpheus Britannicus*); *Age, The Epicure* (1) (*The Theatre of Musick*, 4th book); *Ode to Dick* (*The Banquet of Musick*, 1st book, 1688, and *Orpheus*); *The Epicure* (2) (*Banquet...*, 6th book, 1692, and *Orpheus*, 2nd book, 1702; *The 34 Chapter of Isaiah* (*Harmonia Sacra*, 1688); *The Resurrection* (*Harmonia Sacra*, 1703).

16. *Songs for one, two, and three Voices, to the Thorow-Bass*; ... Collected out of some of the Select Poems of the Incomparable Mr. Cowley, and others; and composed by H. Bowman, Philo-Musicus, 1678. Here we find : *The Epicure* (2), *Love, Christ's Passion* (1st stanza), *David's Song*, and Cowley's translation of the *Sortes Virgilianae*.

Dr. John Blow set : *David's Song* (*The Musical Companion*, 3rd book, 1681) *Septimius* and *Acme* (*Theatre of Musick*, 1st book, 1685), and the 1st stanza of *Christ's Passion* (*Harmonia Sacra*, 1703).

One Mr. Jackson set the *Anacreontic Love* (*Theatre of Musick*, 4th book, 1687).

17. We know, for instance, a ms. copy of *A Poem on the Late Civil War* (seemingly written in Cowley's own hand) in the British Museum (36913, f. 312); the Prologue and the Epilogue to *The Guardian* are extant in *Egerton ms.* 2623 (a list of names on the sheet shows that the poems were circulated), and also in *Egerton ms.* 2725, *Harleian ms.* 6918, *Douce ms.* 357, *Rawl. Poet. ms.* 26); the poem to the Queen Mother about her repairing Somerset House appears, coupled with that of Waller on the same subject (*Egerton ms.* 669); *The Puritan and the Papist*, was at least four times copied (*B. M.* : *Burney ms.* 390, *Bodleian Library* : *Douce ms.* 357, *E. Poet.* e. 4, and e. 24).

the commonplace-books, in which eager readers used to jot down for themselves what pleased them most. A more candid mirror of men's minds could hardly be expected, and by the few to which we have had access we can form an opinion of the range and depth of Cowley's fame. Sometimes, his admirers copied whole poems¹⁸; or they would write down the most beautiful lines and even sum up the contents¹⁹; or bestow on Cowley poems that were not his, such as the poem beginning: « Gaze not on Swans... » now fathered by Grosart upon W. Strode²⁰. William Charleton picked « remarks out of Cowley », detaching here a thought, there a group of lines, chiefly from *The Mistress*, but also from the *Miscellanies*, the *Pindarics*, and even the *Essays*²¹. Bishop Kennet went so far as to transcribe Sprat's Latin and English *Accounts* of Cowley, the Latin preface to the 1662 edition of the *Plantarum Libri Duo*, part of the 1656 preface concerning the *Dauides*, extracts from the first book of this latter poem, both English and Latin, and finally some passages about solitude and moderation taken out of the 4th book of *Plantarum*²².

Books give us a more literary view of the problem, and display Cowley's influence over the intellectual elite. Whenever his name occurred, in all quarters, it was mentioned with due respect.

The Earl of Rochester liked him best of all English poets, as his biographer tells us : « Boileau among the French, and Cowley among the English wits were those he admired most »²³. The Chancellor who had so sternly frowned on him at the Restoration acknowledged that he had « made a flight beyond all men »²⁴.

18. *The Given Love*, *The Rich Rival* are to be found in the British Museum (Add. 34660), *Drinking*, in the Bodleian (Add. B. 106).

19. The *Sloane ms.* 4456, for instance, contains, among other commentaries or quotations, a complete analysis of *Friendship in Absence*.

20. In « Abigail Guilford her booke », 1672, with the title : *Mr. Cowley in commendation of his Mistress* (B. M. 28839, f. 31). Cotgrave had published it in *Wits Interpreter*, as *Beauty Extoll'd*. It was set to music by Henry Lawes in 1653 (in *Ayres and Dialogues*), and attributed to Henry Noel, « son to the Lord Viscount Cambden ».

21. B. M. *Sloane ms.* 3962, f. 57.

22. *Lansdowne ms.* 930 (in the B. M.).

23. *Some passages of the Life and Death of the Right Honourable John, Earl of Rochester...* written by his own direction on his death-bed by Gilbert Burnet, D. D. London, 1680 (p. 8).

24. *The Life of Edward Earl of Clarendon... written by himself*. Printed from his original Mss... Oxford MDCCLIX (p. 16).

Sir William Temple regretted that he had not had time to « celebrate Captain Douglas's death », an allusion to the sixth book of the *Plantarum* ²⁵. Sir George Mackenzie found Tasso in Coelia's closet, and by him Cowley, « whose melting works are new » ²⁶.

Among religious persons, Richard Baxter, the puritan latitudinarian, thus voiced his opinion : « These times have produced many excellent poets : among whom for strength of wit Dr. Abraham Cowley justly bears the bell » ²⁷. Joseph Glanvill, in a sermon *Concerning Preaching*, quoted, or rather misquoted Cowley's warning against excessive refinement of thought :

Rather than all be wit, let none be there ²⁸.

When William King set to music *Poems of Mr. Cowley and others...* in 1668, he thus warned « all lovers of Musick » :

... I intended many more songs which might have made this book far larger; but considering that they were not so fit company for the great Cowley, I have given them leave to find out more suitable acquaintance.

A pamphleteer, the author of *The Transproser Rehears'd*, desirous of showing « what grounds there are of Fears and Jealousies of Popery », twice called *The Puritan and the Papist* to the rescue, and termed Cowley : « our incomparable Cowley » ²⁹. As to the publisher of the sixth book of *Plantarum*, made English, he considered him as « the greatest Master perhaps that ever the world knew (Virgil excepted) » ³⁰. The editor of Waller's *Poems* in 1690 recalled Cowley's saying, that : « a neat tomb of marble

25. *Memoirs of the Life, Works, and Correspondence of Sir William Temple, Bart.* By the Rt. Hon. Thomas P. Courtenay. In 2 vols. London, 1836, I, p. 251.

26. *The Works of that eminent and learned Lawyer*, Sir George Mackenzie of Rosenaugh... Edinburgh 1716 (*Coelia's Country House and Closet*, p. 17).

27. *Poetical Fragments : Heart-Employment with God and it self...* By Richard Baxter. London. 1681 (Preface).

28. The actual line reads : « Rather than all things wit, let none be there » (*Some Discourses, Sermons, and Remains of the Rev. Mr. Joseph Glanvill...* London, 1681, p. 65).

29. *The Transproser Rehears'd*; or, the fifth Act of Mr. Bayes's play. Being a postscript to the animadversions on the Preface to Bp. Bramhall's vindication... shewing what grounds there are of Fears and Jealousies of Popery. Oxford, 1673 (p. 71, 73).

30. *An Heroic Poem on the late Horrid Rebellion...* London, 1683.

is a better monument than a great pile of rubbish », to justify the selection he was making³¹; and to the question : « Who in your opinion deserves the title of the best poet that ever was ? » the editor of *The Athenian Mercury* for July 1691 answered, after declaring that Davenant had « a great genius », « Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and some Poems of his will never be equalled », « Waller is the most correct we have » : « too much can't be said of Mr. Cowley »³².

A correspondent of Anthony-à-Wood, deplored the hard fate of the « friends of the Muses », and gave Cowley the title of « their chief darling »³³. Nor was he alone in his opinion, and for the public, indeed, his sad repulse at the Restoration had become a symbol of royal ingratitude and poetic ill-fortune. We have already quoted Robert Wild's dialogue with Nathan Wanley in 1668. Matthew Morgan exclaimed, in *A Poem to the Queen*, 1691 :

He did complain of Fame's inconstant breath,
And he is robb'd of that too after death³⁴.

In Nathaniel Lee's *Prologue to Constantine the Great*, parents of sons born « under the starving sign of Capricorn » were thus advised :

Tell'em how Spencer starv'd, how Cowley mourn'd,
How Butler's faith and service was returned...³⁵.

Dryden himself invited Rochester's generosity by hinting at Cowley's fate : « Tis enough for an Age to have neglected Mr. Cowley and starved Mr. Butler »³⁶.

31. *The Second Part of Mr. Waller's Poems*. Containing his alteration of *The Maids Tragedy*, and whatever of his is yet unprinted : together with some other *Poems, Speeches, etc.*, that were printed severally, and never put into the first collections of his Poems. London, 1690.

32. *The Athenian Mercury* : resolving weekly all the most nice and curious questions propos'd by the ingenious, Saturday. July 11 1691 (vol. II, n° 14).

33. Letter dated : 19 september 1693. (In *Rawlinson ms. D 962, f. 562*).

34. This poem is copied on a leaf added to Winstanley's *Lives* in a copy of the B. M.

35. *Prologue to Constantine the Great (The Works of Mr. Nathaniel Lee, in two volumes. London, 1713, II, p. 165)*.

36. *To Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester (The Works of John Dryden... Edited by Sir Walter Scott... revised and corrected by G. Saintsbury. Edinburgh 1883, V, p. 104)*.

Among men of letters, of course, tokens of admiration were numberless. Etherege alluded to a description of the *Davideis* in his comedy *The Man of Mode*, when he spoke of « the haughty Merab »³⁷. Thomas Flatman, embarking on the perilous seas of poetry, felt encouraged by Cowley's example :

... where th'illustrious Cowley led the way,
I thought it great discretion to go astray³⁸.

In the same key, Oldham, to prove that poetry could not admit of mediocrity boldly asserted :

Whoe're will please, must please us to the height :
He must a Cowley or a Fleckno be,
For there's no second rate in poetry³⁹.

Poets truly looked up to him and acknowledged him as their master. It is most characteristic that, in their commendatory verses, they seemed unable to praise their fellow-writers except by comparing them with Cowley.

Samuel Gardiner commending Woodford's *Paraphrase upon the Psalms of David*, hailed Cowley and Orinda as the chief ornaments of the Age⁴⁰. Thomas Flatman's poem to Woodford on the same subject deplored that Cowley lived no longer⁴¹.

Flatman himself received in his turn similar encomiums : Richard Newcourt thought that people would relish his book, because it was

Fully fraught with staple ware,
Such as the works of the great Cowley are,

37. *The Man of Mode*, 1676. Act. III, sc. 1, l. 53-56. Cf. *Dav.* III, l. 699, 705-6 (Cf. a note of E. L. Hewins in the *Times' Literary Supplement*, October 13, 1927).

38. *The Voyage. A new Collection of Poems and Songs*. Written by several persons. Never printed before. London, 1674 (p. 52).

39. *The Works of Mr. John Oldham, together with his remains*. London, 1684 (*Horace his Art of Poetry, imitated in English...*, p. 31).

40. *To my dear Friend Mr. Samuel Woodford, upon his Paraphrase of the Psalms*.

41. *To my Rev. friend Dr. Samuel Woodford, on his excellent Version of the Psalms, Pindarique Ode* (st. 2) (*Poems and Songs by Thomas Flatman*. The 4th edition... London, 1686).

And 'mongst our rarest English poems, thine
Next unto his, immortally shall shine... 42.

The greatest compliment Thomas Shadwell could pay Pietro Reggio, the Italian musician, was to exalt his choice of Cowley's poems for the subjects of his songs 43.

Philip Ayres wrote a sonnet on the same occasion, and to the same effect : If Pindar has gained glory through his odes,

Then English Pindar shall for ever live,
Since his Divine and Lofty Poetry
Secured, great Reggio, by thy Harmony,
Shall to it self Immortal glory give 44.

Mrs. Aphra Behn's excellence was proved by the fact that there was « none midst the Poetick Quire »,

But justly will admire
The Trophies of thy Wit...;
Or Virgil's shade, or Ovid's ghost,
Of Ages past the pride and boast;
Or Cowley (first of ours) refuse
That thou shouldst be companion of their Muse... 45.

Nathaniel Lee, in his dedication of *The Rival Queens* to the Earl of Mulgrave, could think of nothing better to please his noble patron, than comparing him with « two of the most famous characters, that ever Ancient or Modern Story could produce; the mighty Scipio, and the retired Cowley » 46.

When Dryden died, Alexander Oldys composed an ode in which Waller, Milton, and Cowley, successively welcomed their great

42. *To his esteemed friend Mr. Thomas Flatman, upon the publishing of his Poems.* In a Pindaric ode devoted to the same purpose, Octave Pulleyn again compared his friend with Cowley and Orinda.

43. *To my much respected Master, and worthy Friend, Signior Pietro Reggio, on the publishing a book of Songs.*

44. *A Sonnet. On Signior Pietro Reggio his setting to music several of Mr. Cowley's Poems (Lyric Poems... By Philip Ayres. London, 1687).*

A Latin poem of « Ludovicus Maidwell », harps on the same chord.

45. *To Madame Aphra Behn on the publication of her Poems* (By F. N. W.). In *The Works of Mrs. Aphra Behn*, ed. by Montague Summers, 1915 (vol. VI, p. 136).

46. *The Rival Queens, or, the Death of Alexander the Great... By Nathaniel Lee, Gent. London, 1677 (Dedication).*

successor to the poets' Paradise; and Cowley, when his turn came to speak, was introduced as « our English Abraham »,

In Heaven the second of that name,
Cowley, as glorious there as sacred here in fame... 47.

*
**

These facts afford ample proof that, by common consent, Cowley seemed to be taken as the ideal model whom every poet must devoutly wish to approach. Nothing is less surprising than that they should have sought after his leadership. In truth, in the generation writing between his death and the end of the century, few were those who did not deliberately submit to his influence.

Even those who, as critics, were so bold as not to find his art faultless, proved his disciples when writing poetry themselves. John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, duke of Buckinghamshire, whom we shall find again as a strict upholder of the Rules, when he replied to Cowley's ode on Brutus, fought him (on political grounds) with his own words. His ode is crammed with reminiscences, not only from Cowley's own poem, but from various parts of his works. Elsewhere, he praised Hobbes much as Cowley had praised Bacon, and the beginning of his *Essay on Poetry* bears the impress of the ode *Of Wit* 48.

Similar « answers » were now and then produced. Cowley had written a fine ode to his friend and master, Hobbes. « A lover of Truth and Virtue » contradicted him stanza after stanza, almost

47. *An Ode by way of Elegy, on the universally lamented death of the incomparable Mr. Dryden, by Alexander Oldys...* (*The Works of John Dryden...* V, p. 249).

48. The passage on friendship seems to be derived from the *Davideis*, and the lines :

Ye saw, and smiled upon this matchless pair,
Who still betwixt them did so many virtues share...

remind us of the eighth stanza in the ode upon the Restoration of Charles II (*The Poems of John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire*, Chalmers. *English Poets*, vol. X). Cowley's ode on *Brutus* was also opposed by the publisher of *Wit and Loyalty reviv'd...* 1682, in a preface where he regrets that it is not, with the poem to the Bishop of Lincoln, omitted from his works, being « satyrs upon himself, and so unworthy of his name ».

line by line ⁴⁹. A seventeenth century teetotaller replied to his Anacreontic *Drinking* ⁵⁰. The Earl of Rochester aped his poem *Against Hope* in a burlesque ode *Upon Nothing* ⁵¹. But such opposition never meant disrespect towards Cowley. His ideas might be opposed, he was none the less admired and revered.

Most poets were quite content to follow in his footsteps. Some, like John Oldham, were apparently unable to « indite » without recalling some echo of Cowley's music, and their verse bears witness to their intimate knowledge of his poems ⁵². When the Rev. Samuel Wesley attempted to narrate, in a heroic poem, *The Life of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, he did not fail to acknowledge his indebtedness to the *Davideis*, and give due praise to the unrivalled excellence of the work ⁵³. It is not always an easy task to trace in love verses the influence of *The Mistress*, itself the product of so many influences, yet the poems of William Walsh often echo the themes chosen by Cowley ⁵⁴. As to Thomas Flatman, he used the same devices again and again. He for instance mimicked Cowley's Anacreontic style in a complimentary poem addressed to Pietro Reggio :

Whether we write of Heroes and of Kings,
In mighty numbers, mighty things,
Or in a humble ode express our sense
Of th'happy state of ease and innocence... ⁵⁵.

49. Mr. Cowley's Ode in praise of Mr. Hobbes, oppos'd by a Lover of Truth and Virtue. This poem is part of *The True Effigies of the Monster of Malmesbury : or, Thomas Hobbes in his proper colours*. London, 1680.

50. Farmer ms. 8013 f. 62-3 (Chetham Library). *Drinking* was transcribed into Latin : *Odi Anacreontis (vel potius paraphrasis Couleii) carmine latino* (Tanner ms. 306, f. 142).

51. *Upon Nothing*. A Poem. By the Right Hon. John late Earl of Rochester. Now first correctly printed. London, 1711.

52. *The Works of Mr. John Oldham, together with his remains*. London, 1684 (vol. II, p. 20, 107..., vol. III, p. 143-188..., vol. IV, p. 61, 63, 106...).

53. *The Life of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ*. An Heroic Poem, dedicated to her most Sacred Majesty... Attempted by Samuel Wesley... London, 1693.

54. *Letters and Poems, amorous and gallant...* By William Walsh, Esq. London, 1692.

55. Cf. *Poems and Songs by Thomas Flatman...* London, 1686 (In *Saintsbury's Minor Caroline Poets*, vol. III, p. 371). Cf. also the two poems : *For Thoughts*, and *Against Thoughts*, a repetition of the process applied by Cowley in *For Hope*, and *Against Hope*.

The Pindaric Odes, after the manner of Cowley, swayed tyrannically over the whole field of lyricism. Every poet, bad and good alike, followed blindly in his track. Sprat had led the way, Mrs. Katherine Philips had followed. Books of poetry were now flooded with Pindarics of every description. The *Miscellany Poems and Translations by Oxford Hands*, published in 1685, the *Miscellany, being a Collection of Poems by several Hands*, issued in the same year, may prove the extraordinary — not to say excessive — vogue of the new genre. Francis Willis, Mrs. Aphra Behn, and Edward Howard, were among the chief offenders. How closely Cowley's Odes were at times copied may be seen from the beginning of this poem by Francis Willis :

Go, go, My Muse, the winged horse prepare :
I purpose now to take the air;
Take solid Judgment for the bit,
And put on the rich ornaments of wit... 56.

As Edward Phillips said, « Tis pleasant to observe what a notable trade hath been driven of late in Pindaric Odes »... 57.

Cowley himself was praised, as was befitting, in Pindaric strains, by Samuel Wesley and Thomas Higgons :

Begin, begin, my Muse, thy noble Choir,
And aim at something worthy Pindar's Lyre,
Within thy Breast excite the Kindling Fire,
And fan it with thy voice !
Cowley does to *Jove* belong,
Jove and *Cowley* claim my Song 58.

Thomas Flatman never wrote an occasional poem but it was a

56. *Miscellany Poems and Translations by Oxford hands*... London, 1685. p. 27 (Cf. in the same volume a striking imitation of *The Soul* (in Waller's edition of Cowley, I, p. 107) entitled *The Union* (p. 185).

57. *Theatrum Poetarum*, Or, a Compleat Collection of the Poets, especially the most eminent, of all Ages... By Edward Phillips. London..., 1675, pt. II, p. 1...

58. *On Mr. Cowley's Juvenile Poems, and the translation of His Plantarum. A Pindarique* (st. 3; in the 1711 edition of Cowley, vol. III, 1st commendatory poem). Here is the beginning of Cowley's *Olympique Ode* :

... Begin, begin thy noble Choice,
And let the Hills around reflect the Image of thy Voice.
Pisa does to *Jove* belong,
Jove and *Pisa* claim thy song...

The poem by Higgons is in volume I : *Upon the death of Mr. Cowley*.

Pindaric ⁵⁹, and even created that strange monster, the « Pindaric Pastoral Ode », to bewail the death of his « worthy friend » John Oldham, truly deserving Rochester's scathing lines :

Flatman, who Cowley imitates with pains,
And rides a jaded Muse, whipt with loose rains... ⁶⁰.

Charles Cotton, for all his love of simplicity and sincerity could not avoid writing seven Pindarics, even closely adapting one of Cowley's poems, reversed, into a Cowleyan ode ⁶¹.

Yalden's *Hymn to the Morning in praise of Light* was strangely reminiscent of the *Hymn To Light* published by Sprat among the *Verses written upon severall Occasions* in 1668, as the first stanza will show :

Parent of day ! whose beauteous beams of light
Spring from the darksom womb of night :
And midst their native horrors show
Like gems adorning of the negro's brow...

if compared with Cowley's :

First born of Chaos, who so fair didst come
From the old *Negro's* darksome womb !
Which when it saw the lovely Child,
The melancholy Mass put on kind looks and smil'd... ⁶².

Matthew Prior, still at college, chose to transcribe part of the *Exodus* pindarically, and we ever and again detect in his verse distinct borrowings from Cowley, while the *Carmen Seculare*, twelve years later, proved him a master-poet, yet still Cowley's disciple ⁶³.

59. Cf. *On the death of the Rt Hon. Thomas Earl of Orrery; On the death of the Illustrious Prince Rupert...*

60. Quoted by F. A. Child. *The Life and uncollected Poems of Thomas Flatman*. Philadelphia. 1921, p. 21.

61. *Beauty. Pindaric ode*. In answer to an Ode of Mr. A. Cowley's upon the same subject (*Poems of Charles Cotton*. 1630-1687. Edited with an Introduction and notes by John Beresford. London, 1923, p. 215-217).

62. *Miscellany Poems*. Containing variety of new translations of the Ancient Poets. Together with several original Poems. By the most eminent Hands. Publish'd by Mr. Dryden. The fourth edition. London..., 1716, vol. III, p. 54. Cf. again st. 2, 3, 4.

63. Cf. in the paraphrase of *Exodus*, such expressions as « Mountainous heaps of Wonders; « through the mysterious Gulph of Vast Immensity ». In the *Carmen Seculare*, cf. the 16th stanza, and Cowley's *Resurrection*, st. 4.

Swift addressed Sir William Temple and the Athenian Society in Pindaric measures ⁶⁴, and Dryden himself, as we shall see, first served as an apprentice under Cowley's guidance.

Indeed, Cowley's own saying about love-poems being a necessary accomplishment of every would-be poet might well be applied to this new fashion :

Sooner or later they must all pass through that Tryal, like some *Mahumetan Monks*, that are bound by their order, once at least in their life, to make a *Pilgrimage* to Meca... ⁶⁵.

II

Meanwhile, critics did not remain inactive, and duly poured forth laudatory estimates. Every compiler of biographical collections was eager to show his appreciation of this universally admired genius, and harped, on a more modest scale, on the themes so fully developed by Sprat.

Thomas Skinner, relating the contemporary history of England to 1669, devoted a paragraph of ecstatic praise to Cowley's memory, both as a man and as a poet :

His poetical fancy seemed to be inspired with some divine breath; which in sweet numbers, the monuments of his own glory, after Maro and the delights of Rome, equalled the Raptures of Pindar and the gratefulness of Athens. No man was more sublime, nor modest than he; and he lived with the same politeness and grace as he wrote, in verse and manners being equally conspicuous ⁶⁶.

James Heath and David Lloyd kept up the same key-note, the former commenting on his premature death : « Heaven perhaps thought he had done enough, that could not well do more than make himself immortal » ⁶⁷, while Lloyd aptly defined his poetry

64. *Ode to the Honourable Sir William Temple*, 1689, and *Ode to the Athenian Society*, 1691.

65. Preface to the volume of 1656, p. 10. Let us notice, by the way, that this very phrase was alluded to by W. Walsh in his *Dialogue concerning Women* (Works, 1736 ed., p. 160).

66. *Motus Compositi : or, the History of the composing the affairs of England by the Restoration of King Charles the Second, and the punishment of the Regicides : and other principal Occurents to the year 1669*. Written in latin by Thomas Skinner, D. D. Made English. London, 1685 (p. 99).

67. *A Chronicle of the late intestine War in the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland...* By James Heath, Gent. The second edition... London, 1676 (p. 564).

as « grave, calm, sober and chaste as his life; not gay all over, but skilled when to be witty, and when to be wise »⁶⁸.

Henry Keepe, guiding us through Westminster Abbey, united Chaucer and Cowley, as « the first and last best poets of the English Nation », Chaucer being « the sun just rising » :

And so by degrees increasing and growing in strength till it came to its full glory and meridian in the incomparable Cowley, whose admirable genius, hard to be imitated, but never equalled, hath set the bounds to succeeding times...⁶⁹.

Edward Phillips hailed him as « the most applauded poet of our Nation both of the present and past Ages »⁷⁰. So did Winstanley, so did Langbaine, who warned his readers that :

Mr. Cowley was a person of so great merit and esteem in the world when living; and his memory so fresh in the minds of Learned men, that I am obliged not to pass him slightly over...

I have so great a veneration for the memory of this great man, he added, that methinks his very name seems an ornament to my book, and deserves to be set in the best light I can place it⁷¹.

68. *Memoirs of the Lives, Actions, Sufferings and Deaths of those noble, reverend, and excellent personages, that suffered death, sequestration, decimation, or otherwise, for the Protestant religion... in our late intestine wars, from the year 1637 to the year 1660. And from thence continued to 1666...* By David Lloyd... London, 1677 (p. 620).

69. *Monumenta Westmonasteriensia : or, an historical Account of the original, increase, and present state of St. Peter's or the Abbey Church of Westminster...* By H. K., Gent... London, 1683 (p. 47).

70. *Theatrum Poetarum...* By Edward Phillips (II, 1...).

71. *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets. Or, some Observations and Remarks on the Lives and Writings of all those that have published either comedies, tragedies, tragi-comedies, pastorals, masques, interludes, farces, or opera's in the English tongue.* By Gerard Langbaine. Oxford, 1691, p. 77.

Cowley's reputation of course extended beyond England, and, in Germany for instance, his name was more than once mentioned and praised : Johann Bödiker reviewing the best-known poets of Europe chose Marot, Ronsard, and Malherbe to represent France, Spenser, Cowley and Jonson, for England (*Grundsätze der Deutschen Sprache im Reden und Schreiben...* Vorgestellt von Johanne Bödikero... Cölln an der Spree. 1690, p. 358). Daniel Georg Morhof defined him « poeta insignis, et in cæteris philosophiæ et medicinæ partibus insigniter eruditus » (*Polyhistor*, 1692. Quoted by G. Waterhouse, *The Literary relations of England and Germany in the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge, 1914, p. 123), though he protested against Sprat and Rymer placing him, as an epic poet, above the Italians : « It seems to me it would be sufficient honour for Cowley to place him on an equality with them, a

The various parts of the poet's works were extolled in proportion. Denham had praised his endeavour to write Christian poetry in the *Davideis* ⁷². Samuel Woodford, another pious writer of divine poems, found in Cowley's epic,

... as much as could be expected for the first sitting... whatever is requisite to make an heroick poem beautiful : sound judgment, happy invention, graceful disposition, unaffected facility, strict observance of decencies... ⁷³.

Samuel Wesley, as we have already pointed out, looked up to the *Davideis* as to the supreme model. Spenser and Davenant were, in his eyes, both faulty for various reasons.

But Mr. Cowley's *Davideis* is the medium between both; it has Gombert's majesty without his stiffness, and something of Spencer's sweetness and variety without his irregularity.

So, after explaining that his hero « is according to the Antient Model », and that he has used to perfection all the resources his subject could yield, Wesley concluded : « It is a great loss to the world that the left the work unfinished » ⁷⁴.

To Matthew Morgan, the *Davideis* was not far from surpassing the *Eneid* :

His *Davideis* merits a first place,
The Body's strong, and sprightly is the race :

position he justly deserves... (*Unterricht von der deutschen Sprache*, 1682. Quoted by Waterhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 120).

Hofmanswaldau having given an estimate of English literature, Christian Wernicke thus criticised it : « Of the English Writers, he mentions with admiration Donn and Quarles, whom no Englishman ever reads, and has not a word for Milton, Cowley, Denham, and Waller, whom they justly regard as their best poets » (*Epigramme. Auf die Schlesische Poeten*. Cf. Waterhouse, p. 119). Wernicke also discussed his ode on Brutus in a note to an epigram « Auff Cesars Mord » (*Epigramme*. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Rudolf Pechel. Berlin, 1909, p. 198). The Latin Account of Sprat was reproduced in *Memoriae philosophorum, oratorum, poetarum, historicorum, et philologorum nostri Seculi clarissimorum renovatae...* curante M. Henningo Witten. Francofund... 1679 (II, p. 516-522).

72. *A Version upon the Psalms of David, fitted to the Tunes used in churches*. By the Hon. Sir John Denham... London, 1714 ed. (Preface, p. xxiii).

73. *A Paraphrase upon the Psalms of David*. By Samuel Woodford. London, 1667 (Preface).

74. *The Life of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. An heroic Poem dedicated to her most Sacred Majesty... Attempted by Samuel Wesley... Also a prefatory *Discourse concerning Heroic Poetry*... London, 1693.

'Tis solid sense in vehicle of rime,
 As Ovid sweet, like Virgil is sublime :
 If Nature had but lengthened out his span,
 Cham's had exceeded far the Mantuan swan ⁷⁵.

The Earl of Mulgrave coupled him with Milton, Tasso and Spenser. The ideal epic poet, though well instructed in the rules :

... must do much more than I can say,
 Must above *Cowley*, nay, and *Milton* too prevail,
 Succeed where great *Torquato*, and our greater *Spenser* fail ⁷⁶.

Last, and no doubt most characteristic of all, comes Thomas Rymer. He appreciated the *Davideis* according to the only light he knew, the sacro-sanct Rules. He found Cowley...

a more happy genius for heroick verse than either Spenser or Davenant... : He understood the purity, the perspicuity, the majesty of style, and the virtue of numbers. He could discern what was beautiful and pleasant in nature, and could express his thoughts without the least difficulty or constraint. He understood to dispose of the matters, and to manage his digressions. In short he understood Homer and Virgil, and as prudently made his advantage of them.

Rymer did not, however, esteem the poem wholly correct : the subject, and the title itself, he deemed ill-chosen, « seeing it is rather the actions, than his sufferings, that make an hero »... It was, besides, too openly historical, too exceptional, too impossible : unfit, in a word, « to be proposed for great persons to imitate ». And the plot lacked unity, since Cowley merely proposed « to adorn some several particulars of David's Life », so that he was led from digression to digression, « and David is the least part of the poem ». Another point was, that « he begins not his poem with all the art and address as might be devised », promising so much at the start that he could do nothing more than strictly make his word good. Lastly he was wrong to mix « matters that are purely lyrical », and even lyrical measures, with heroic matter and verse ⁷⁷. Here, for the first time, Cowley

75. Matthew Morgan, *op. cit.*

76. *An Essay upon Poetry*, 1682.

77. *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie*. Containing the necessary, rational and universal Rules for Epick, Dramatick and the other sorts of Poetry. With Reflections on the Works of the Ancient and

was called at the bar to answer for his infractions against the « Rules ». He escaped lightly. Even Rymer, though he took these technical blemishes seriously, seemed to be carried away by the beauty of the whole, and finally declared the poem superior to the *Jerusalem*, for in it, « there shines something of a more fine, more free, more new and more noble air, than appears in the *Hierusalem* of Tasso ».

The *Davideis* stood, to the serious-minded readers of Cowley, as his best, most praiseworthy work. Among the same class of persons, some were beginning to feel uneasy when looking over his love-poems. Not long after Sprat had vindicated *The Mistress* from the charge of immorality, this same charge was again brought in 1670, with vehement indignation, by « a dutiful Son of the Church of England », Edmund Elys. The poems seemed, to the outspoken critic, to come straight from Hell :

Some of them are so notoriously lascivious, others so prophane, that it cannot be easily imagin'd how the devil could be more gratify'd in any thing then in the plausible recommendation of them to the sprightly youths, and pregnant wits of this nation ⁷⁸.

The attack was renewed in the following year by Henry Stubbe. Stubbe protested against the use of Scriptural phrases to illustrate profane notions, and declared :

If any one would understand what is particularly meant by this application of sacred wit to vulgar discourse, and the manner of this holy raillery deduced from Scripture : let him read Mr. Cowley's Poems, especially his *Mistresse*... ⁷⁹.

To which a partisan of Cowley's, perhaps Sprat himself, answer-

Modern Poets, and their faults noted. Made English by Mr. Rymer; by whom is added some *Reflections on English Poets*. London, 1694 (The Preface of the translator).

78. *An Exclamation to all those that Love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, against an Apology written by an ingenious person, for Mr. Cowley's Lascivious and Prophane Verses*. By a dutiful son of the Church of England. London, 1670 (p. 4, sq...).

79. *A Censure upon certain passages contained in the History of the Royal Society, as being destructive to the Established Religion and Church of England*. The second edition, corrected and enlarged. Oxford, 1671, p. 45-46.

ed that it was uncharitable, to say the least, to speak so sharply against a dead man, for « youthful fancies »⁸⁰.

To these rather unexpected strictures on moral and religious grounds, William Walsh added in 1692 a more convincing criticism, the first of a long series, contrasting the love-poems of the Ancients, tender and passionate, with those of the Moderns; who, after the fashion set by Petrarch, only aimed at « surprizing and glittering » thoughts. Indeed, he reflected :

We must allow Dr. Donne to have been a very great wit; Mr. Waller a very gallant writer; Sir John Suckling a very gay one, and Mr. Cowley a great genius; yet methinks I can hardly fancy any one of them to have been a very great lover⁸¹.

Cowley's champion, on this occasion, was Charles Gildon. He endeavoured to prove that the thoughts and turns Walsh considered as artificial and cold in *The Mistress* merely resulted from Cowley's exceptional genius, and lessened in no way his sincerity⁸².

These outbursts of criticism must not hide the fact that *The Mistress* and the *Sacharissa* poems, were acknowledged as the leading love-verses of the age. The sober Samuel Wesley was carried away by his fondness for Cowley into declaring :

If he'll paint his nobler Fire,
Ah ! what Thoughts his Songs inspire,
Vigorous Love and gay Desire...⁸³.

And John Evelyn, the son of Cowley's friend :

80. *The Letter to Mr. Henry Stubs concerning his Censure upon certain passages in the History of the Royal Society*, p. 10 (This answer is to be found printed in the same volume with the *Censure*).

81. *Letters and Poems, amorous and gallant*, by W. W. Esq. Preface, p. viii (In *The Works of William Walsh, Esq.; in prose and verse*. London, 1736).

82. *An Essay at a vindication of the Love-verses of Cowley and Waller, etc...* in answer to the preface of a book intituled, *Letters and Verses, amorous and gallant*. Directed to Mr. Congreve (p. 209, sq...) In *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays, on several subjects...* by several Gentlemen and Ladies. London, 1694, p. 209, sq...

Gildon had parodied Walsh's attack on the very year of its publication, in his *Post-Boy rob'd of his Mail : or, the Pacquet broke open...* (London, 1692) (Cf. the fourth letter, supposed to be written by « a young son of the Muses at the University »).

83. *On Mr. Cowley's Juvenile Poems, and the Translation of his Plantarum. A Pindarique* (to be found in the third volume of Tonson's 1711 edition).

So long shall Cowley be admir'd above
 The Crowd, as David's troubles pity move,
 Till women cease to charm, and youth to Love ^{84.}

Swift certainly voiced the opinion of many readers when he asserted that of all the works of Cowley, it would best survive the test of time ⁸⁵.

He as certainly proved of independent taste when, in the same book, he caused Pindar to destroy Cowley's *Pindarics*, thus hinting at their inferiority to the odes of the Theban poet, for nothing was further from the thoughts of most of his contemporaries than doubting their excellence. We have already mentioned the many pindaric disciples Cowley found among poets. When they wanted to express their critical opinions they did not lose their enthusiasm. Denham thought him equal to his model :

Old Pindar's Flights by him are reached;

and Thomas Higgons :

Cowley with words as full and Thoughts as high
 As ever Pindar did, does fly...;

while the anonymous author of a poem prefixed to the 1689 edition went so far as to declare that he preserved Pindar's fame better than Pindar himself ⁸⁶. As to Flatman, after calling him « the Great Pindar's greatest son », he defined his genius :

Apollo's rare Columbus, he
 Found out new worlds of poesie;
 He, like an Eagle, soar'd aloft,

84. *To Envy*. A poem. Published in John Nichols's *Select Collection of Poems...*, vol. II, p. 135.

85. In the *Battle of the Books*, he chose Cowley and Boileau to command the light horse against the Ancients, and he had him cleft from head to foot by Pindar, one half being turned into a dove and harnessed by Venus to her chariot.

He was later to quote some lines from it — a rare occurrence, as he himself declared : « I do not frequently quote poets, especially English, but I remember there is in some of Cowley's love-verses a strain that I thought extraordinary at fifteen, and have often since imagined it to be spoken by Ireland :

Forbid it Heaven my life should be
 Weigh'd with her least conveniency.

(In a letter concerning the Sacramental Test, Dublin, December 4. 1708. *Prose-Works*, ed. Temple-Scott, vol. IV, p. 10).

86. This poem is the second in the third volume of the 1711 edition.

To seize his noble prey;
 Yet as a dove's his soul was soft,
 Quiet as night but bright as day...⁸⁷.

An interesting piece of criticism was offered by Edward Phillips in his *Theatrum Poetarum*. While he observed « what a notable trade hath been driven of late in Pindaric Odes », he detected, the first of a long line of critics, the inaccuracy of the term « Pindaric ode » applied to the Cowleyan type of ode⁸⁸. This was in itself no stricture on Cowley's own odes. Some, however began to object to these « lawless » poems. The Earl of Mulgrave, depicting them in Cowleyan mode, observed in 1682:

A higher flight, and of a happier force,
 Are *Odes*, the Muses most unruly Horse,
 That bounds so fierce the Rider has not rest,
 But foams at mouth, and speaks like one possest.
 The Poet here must be indeed Inspired,
 And not with fancy, but with fury fired.
Cowley might boast to have perform'd this part,
 Had he with Nature joyn'd the rules of Art;
 But ill expression gives too great Allay
 To that rich Fancy which can ne're decay⁸⁹.

Such scruples were not common, and young Addison, when reviewing the « great English Poets », in 1694, could write with whole-hearted sincerity :

What Muse but thine can equal hints inspire,
 And fits the deep-mouth'd Pindar to thy lyre :
 Pindar, whome others in a labour'd strain,
 And forc'd expression, imitate in vain ?
 Well pleas'd in thee he soars with new delight,
 And plays in more unbounded verse, and takes a nobler flight⁹⁰.

Other parts of Cowley's works were occasionally appreciated.

87. To My Rev. friend Dr. Samuel Woodford, on his excellent version of the *Psalms*. *Pindarique Ode* (St. 1. *Poems...*, p. 27).

88. He had made the same remark in more general terms in the preface to his book (quoted by Spingarn in his *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, vol. II, p. 265).

89. *An essay upon Poetry* (quoted by Spingarn, op. cit., p. 289).

90. *An Account of the greatest English Poets*. To Mr. H. S. April 3. 1694 (*The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*, edited by A. C. Guthkelch. London, 1914, I, p. 32).

Nathaniel Lee, in the Dedication of *The Rival Queens*, spoke highly of his translations from the Latin poets, asserting that they had not been and could not be surpassed. Francis Willis gave as his reason for attempting his *Anacreon done into English*, the charm of Anacreon,

as also the tempting pattern set by the inimitable Mr. Cowley: where he has rendred part of this author so lively in an English dress, that I began to esteem it of allmost equal beauty with the original.

He further justified his loose way of translating by saying : « I can easily satisfy myself that tis nothing but what is authorized by Mr. Cowley... »⁹¹. Matthew Prior humbled the poets of his generation, by appealing to Cowley :

In vain we from our sonnetteers require
The height of Cowley's and Anacreon's Lyre;
In vain we bid'em fill the bowl,
Large, as their capacious Soul...⁹².

The anonymous translator of Saint-Evremond's *Essays* was the first to acknowledge his talent as a critic, though criticism was as yet hardly practised in England⁹³.

We hear little or nothing about the rest of Cowley's works, either about his plays (except for the notice in Langbaine's *Account*), and his prose writings, or his Latin poems (save for Nahum Tate's preface to his translation of the *Plantarum* in 1689, which can hardly be called a piece of criticism)⁹⁴.

Cowley was at that time essentially a poet. His fame rested on his epic and lyrical achievement, and there it was so firmly rooted, it had such a solid hold on the taste of the Age, that a criticism of his talent was scarcely thought of. Admiration and

91. *Anacreon done into English out of the Original Greek*. Oxford, 1683.

92. *The Seventh Satire of Juvenal*, being a Satyr on the Poets (*Works*, edited by R. B. Johnson, 1892, vol. II, p. 377).

It was printed anonymously in Gildon's *Chorus Poetarum*, 1674, under the title : « *A Satyr against Poetry* ». The first line read :

In vain from our starv'd Songsters we require...

93. *Mixt Essays, written originally in French by the Sieur de St. Evremond*, 1685 (Quoted by W. P. Ker : *Essays of John Dryden*, vol. II, p. 377). The very same sentence is to be found in Thomas Pope Blount's *De Re Poetica*, p. 114.

94. Dryden paid a passing compliment to « Mr. Cowley's praise of a Country life » — and even that actually bore on the poem translated out of Virgil (*Postscript to the Aeneis. Works...*, XV, p. 193).

reverence were the feelings roused in all by his name. As Carew had said earlier of Donne,

He ruled as he thought fit
The universal Monarchy of Wit.

*
**

And yet, the reign of Wit stood on the verge of ruin. A dangerous rival was rising, soon to overthrow it. People began to obey the dictates of the new master : Judgment. In wit, they had relished ingenuity and agility of thought. They had delighted in the subtle analogies the « metaphysical » poets discovered between remote objects. They had enjoyed the thrill of novelty. Now, growing sedate, they developed a distrust of imagination in all its shapes, and took a refuge in the steady realms of reason. They sought aptness rather than originality of expression, and plain logic in thought rather than the fanciful mazes of the conceit. They welcomed simplicity in style, smoothness and evenness in versification. They raised in every quarter the barrier of rules, and strictly judged by them. Individual taste was confined within the neo-classical mould. Thus, as far as Cowley's reputation was concerned, began an age of restrictions and censures.

Criticism was tentative at first, as if afraid of laying hands upon the hallowed body of his works. Wrapped up among eulogies, it seemed to ask forgiveness for its almost sacrilegious daring. We have seen how Rymer, pinning down for examination several faulty aspects of the *Davideis* in the light of his code of rules, yet expressed his enthusiastic admiration for the poem as a whole. Mulgrave regretted that he had not « with Nature joined the rules of Art », but bowed low before « that rich Fancy which can ne're decay ». Even then, some could quote without reservation Sprat's paragraph on the perfect balance of fancy and judgment in Cowley :

His fancy flowed with great speed, and therefore it was very fortunate to him, that his judgment was equal to manage it. He never runs his reader, nor his argument, out of breath. He perfectly practises the hardest secret of good writing, to know when he has done enough ⁹⁵.

95. Sir Thomas Pope Blount. *Characters and Censures of the most considerable Poets, whether Ancient or Modern* (In *De Re Poetica*, 1694, p. 50).

But this was precisely what was becoming the least acceptable of Sprat's statements, to the contemporaries of Dryden. In a review of the English poets, written some time during this period, Cowley had received extravagant praise. His *Davideis*, *The Mistress*, the *Essays*, above all the *Pindaric Odes*, were in turn exalted :

... Nature wrought wonders then; when Shakespeare dy'd,
Her dearest Cowley rose, drest in her gaudy pride...

.....
With what Delight he tunes his silver strings,
And David's toils, in David's Numbers sings.
Hark ! how he murmurs to the fields and groves
Her rural pleasures, and his various Loves...

.....
Immortal Cowley ! who alone could dare
With wings well balanc'd tempt th'unbounded air.
Who to his lyre Pindarick strains could call,
Nor fear'd the danger of a threatned fall...

.....
Rich is his Fancy, his Invention strong,
His wit, unfathomed, has a fresh supply,
Is always flowing out but never dry.
Sure the profuseness of a boundless thought,
And lavish'd wit was ne're allow'd a fault...

Yet this idolatrous admirer was bound to acknowledge that his art was not without blemishes. He twice lamented the fact that Cowley had not lived in more propitious times :

If you who read him well, should chance to find
His Phrase too mean t'express his lofty mind,
His turns too numerous, or too harsh his rhyme,
Impute it to his years, and Fortune's crime.
He stood afar, and view'd the Promis'd Land;
But perish'd ere he touch'd the Sacred Strand.

.....
O had he liv'd to Waller's reverend age,
Better'd his measures, and reform'd his page !
Then Britain's Isle might raise her trophies high,
And solid Rome, or witty Greece out-vy... 96.

96. *Poetae Britannici. A Poem* (The title-page is missing from the British Museum copy, but the date suggested is 1690).

Respectful as this last criticism proves, it is no less significant. It was becoming difficult to praise Cowley unrestrictedly. Reservations would creep into the most rapturous eulogy.

When Knightly Chetwood commended the Earl of Roscommon's *Essay on translated Verse*, he duly pointed out the merit of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, and asserted that Cowley and Denham « gained immortal praise ». But he qualified his compliments by stating :

But still our language had some ancient rust,
Our flights were often high, but seldom just ⁹⁷.

On Waller's death, Cowley was unhesitatingly placed below him. This partly came from the unavoidable necessity of depreciating one to praise the other, yet Bevil Higgons and John Cotton were no doubt conscious of expressing the truth when one exclaimed :

Let him with Spenser and great Cowley be,
He who's so much the greatest of the three...

and the other :

The choice of tuneful words t'express our thought,
By thy example we have first been taught.
Our English Virgil, and our Pindar too,
In this (tis said) some negligence did shew ⁹⁸.

More precisely still, Addison wrote in his *Account of the greatest English Poets* :

Great Cowley then (a mighty genius) wrote,
O'er-run with wit, and lavish of his thought;
His turns too closely on the reader press :
He more had pleas'd us, had he pleas'd us less.
One glittering thought no sooner strikes our eyes
With silent wonder, but new wonders rise.
As in the milk-way a shining white
O'er-flows the Heav'ns with one continu'd light;
That not a single star can shew his rays,
Whilst jointly all promote the common blaze.

97. K. Dillon, Earl of Roscommon. *An Essay on translated Verse*. The second edition, 1685.

98. *On the death of Mr. Waller*. By Mr. Bevil Higgons (printed in John Nichols's *Select Collection of Poems...* London, 1787, vol. I, p. 130); and : *To the memory of Mr. Waller*. By Sir John Cotton (*Ibid.*, p. 140).

He was thereby dealing him the hardest blow the poet had as yet received, since it was aimed, not at externals or technicalities, but at the very essence of his genius. In the same passage, however, the young critic, ashamed, as it were, at his own rudeness, corrected it by these lines :

Pardon, great poet, that I dare to name
Th'unnunnumber'd beauties of thy verse with blame;
Thy fault is only wit in its excess,
But wit like thine in any shape will please,

and concluded with the praise of the *Pindaric odes* we have already quoted ⁹⁹.

This attitude is characteristic of the age. Cowley had been the revered master of the whole generation. His authority was undisputed. But, in proportion as the neo-classical instinct grew more conscious and shaped itself into a theory, he was felt more distant, and a break took place in his intimacy with his readers and disciples, who then became his judges. And when, in the light of the changing taste, his faults began to be perceived, it was with a kind of shyness that they were publicly exposed. Such unavoidable censures were always worded in the gentlest possible terms. Cowley's admirers prepared to lose their idol with a heavy heart, and their reason had to struggle hard with their instinctive allegiance.

III

No one felt this compulsion and echoed this struggle more clearly and keenly than the greatest poet then living, the Laureate, John Dryden. The neo-classical qualms of conscience found in him their truest exponent. By the end of the period he had come to realize fully what average readers of Cowley were unconscious, or only half conscious, of : the necessity of a choice between their old idol and the new creed. The light of his reason was stronger than theirs.

⁹⁹. *An Account of the greatest English Poets...* (In *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*, 1914, I, p. 32).

It must be remembered first of all that Dryden began his literary life as a devoted follower of Cowley's. We shall find him speaking of Cowley in terms of affectionate respect, calling him « the darling of my youth »¹⁰⁰, mentioning Virgil's master, Epicurus, « and my better master Cowley »¹⁰¹, insisting that « his authority is almost sacred to me »¹⁰². His early poems afford ample proof of his discipleship, abounding as they do in metaphysical conceits¹⁰³, and to the end he enjoyed « wit » as Donne and Cowley understood it. Actual reminiscences of his « darling » occur in his verse. His poem to Dr. Charleton closely echoed the lines to Hobbes and to the Royal Society. He skilfully parodied in *Mac Flecknoe* Cowley's description of Hell in the *Davideis*. He wrote *Pindaric odes*, of course, and some of them rank among his most beautiful and mature productions¹⁰⁴. He thus followed Cowley, at first, much as Cowley had followed Spenser, and we may add that he dealt with him in a similar manner. For just as Cowley abandoned Spenser to obey Donne, and later submitted to the same influences as Waller and Denham, Dryden, when his maturing taste developed along neo-classical lines, felt his enthusiasm for his old master grow colder, and evolved a fairly comprehensive criticism of his genius.

The first mention we find is one of those sweeping and rather vague eulogies of which the preceding age had been so lavish : the Ancients, he thought...

... can produce nothing so courtly writ, or which expresses so much the conversation of a gentleman, as Sir John Suckling; nothing so even, sweet, and flowing, as Mr. Waller; nothing so elevated, so copious and full of spirits, as Mr. Cowley...¹⁰⁵;

100. *A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (Quoted by Ker. *Essays of John Dryden*, II, p. 108).

101. *Dedication of Aureng-Zebe* (*Works*, Walter Scott ed., V, p. 194).

102. *An Essay of Heroic Plays* (Cf. Ker, *op. cit.*, I, p. 154).

103. Cf. The Elegy on the death of Lord Hastings, the poem on the death of Cromwell, *Astræa Redux*, and even *Annus Mirabilis*.

104. Cf. *Threnodia Augustalis*, *A Funeral Pindaric Poem to the happy Memory of King Charles II; To the Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew; on the death of Mr. Purcell; Alexander's Feast*. Cf. about this question, Mark Van Doren, *The Poetry of John Dryden*. New-York, 1920, and A. H. Nethercot's article on *The Reputation of Cowley* (*P. M. L. A.*, vol. XXXVIII, p. 600).

105. *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1669). Quoted by Ker, *op. cit.*, I, p. 35.

the epithet « copious », being of course meant as a compliment. The next is more precise, yet still of a general character, and shows unrestricted admiration for Cowley's most « metaphysical » quality, his wit. For, inveighing against « superfluity and waste of wit » as a folly of the age, he never dreamt of charging Cowley with this fault, but on the contrary stated that he had « a greater portion of it than any man I know », and approvingly quoted his saying :

Rather than all things wit, let there be none ¹⁰⁶.

In his *Essay of Heroic Plays*, published in 1672, he inaugurated critical remarks. But so mild is his hint at Cowley's inconsistency, when advocating a purely human epic while he actually brought into his *Davideis* the supernatural elements demanded by tradition, that it can hardly be called a censure. We learn, by the way, that Cowley's authority was then « almost sacred » to him ¹⁰⁷.

In 1677 he was still whole-heartedly vindicating the boldest conceits in the *Davideis*, « the hardest metaphors », « the strongest hyperboles », for, to be sure, « the boldest strokes of poetry... are those which most delight the reader », and the Ancients, Virgil and Horace, as well as the Greeks, Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, have used them freely. Thus, when Cowley, « our admirable Cowley », painted Goliath as seen by the Israelites :

The valley now, this monster seem'd to fill,
And we, methought, looked up to him from our hill,

the hyperbole (beyond being sanctified by Virgil's previous use of it in his description of Polyphemus and skilfully « mollified » by the words « seemed » and « methought »), very aptly and naturally evoked, to Dryden's mind, the fright of the Israelites. Those who dared find fault with these figures — the neo-classical theorists, in fact —, came in for a severe rebuke :

106. Preface to *An Evening's Love; or, The Mock Astrologer*, 1671 (Ker, *op. cit.*, I, p. 139).

107. Dryden himself thought the use of the supernatural quite necessary in an epic poem. « Neither, he said, am I much concerned at Mr. Cowley's verses before *Gondibert* (though his authority is almost sacred to me) : tis true, he has resembled the epic poem to a fantastic fairy land; but he has himself made use of Angels and Visions in his *Davideis*, as well as Tasso in his *Godfrey...* » (*An Essay of Heroick Plays*, prefixed to *The Conquest of Granada*, 1672. Ker, *op. cit.*, I, p. 154).

All that is dull, insipid, languishing, without sinews, in a poem, they call an imitation of nature... What fustian, as they call it, have I heard these gentlemen find out in Mr. Cowley's Odes !... Nothing can appear more beautiful to me, than the strength of those images which they condemn ¹⁰⁸.

The best descriptions of Virgil and Cowley may be too easily ridiculed, if commented upon by strict prosaic commonsense. Obviously Dryden's judgment still yielded to his love of wit.

He next praised Cowley and Denham for setting free imitations above literal translations (or, as he himself called it: metaphrase), and paid a magnificent tribute to Cowley's pindaric genius :

To add and to diminish what we please, which is the way avowed by him, ought only to be granted to Mr. Cowley, and that, too in his translations of Pindar, because he alone was able to make him amends, by giving him better of his own, whenever he refused his author's thoughts.

Such an imitation, he added, was no easy task, and needed « a genius so elevated and unconfined as Mr. Cowley's ». Dryden clearly looked up to him as to the happy rival of the Greek poet, and considered his *Odes* a matchless achievement ¹⁰⁹.

But the wheel was inexorably turning, and Dryden, gaining in self-mastery and independence, grew conscious that much of the old manner of writing must be sacrificed to the new. When he again turned to the subject, in 1685, his praise was no longer unbounded :

Every one knows it was introduced into our language, in this age, by the happy genius of Mr. Cowley; The seeming easiness of it has made it spread; ... but it languishes in almost every hand but his, and some very few... He indeed has brought it as near perfection as was possible in so short a time. But if I may be allowed to speak my mind modestly, and without injury to his sacred ashes, somewhat of the purity of English, somewhat of more equal thoughts, somewhat of sweetness in the numbers, in one word, somewhat of a finer turn and more lyrical verse, is yet wanting. As for the soul of it, which consists

108. *The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence*, prefix'd to *The State of Innocence and fall of Man, an Opera*, 1677 (Ker, *op. cit.*, p. 182, sq...).

109. *Preface to the translation of Ovid's Epistles*, 1680 (Ker, *op. cit.*, p. 237, sq...).

in the warmth and vigour of fancy, the masterly figures, and the copiousness of imagination, he has excelled all others in this kind... What I have said is the general opinion of the best judges, and in a manner has been forced from me, by seeing a noble sort of poetry so happily restored by one man, and so grossly copied by almost all the rest. A musical ear, and a great genius, if another Mr. Cowley could arise in another age, may bring it to perfection ¹¹⁰.

Cowley remained « happy » in having created the new genre; he towered far above the crowd of all would-be pindarists; he was not wanting in inspiration, or in poetic fire. What he lacked, to reach perfection, was more art, a more exact knowledge of the rules. In stating this reservation, Dryden was leaving the old track and bowing before the classical claims for pure style, even thoughts and smooth verse, trammelling with them the poet's natural genius. He began to perceive that, in this respect, Cowley lay open to criticism ¹¹¹.

The current was irresistible, and he was swept along by it. Eight years later, in his *Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, he took up the charge brought forward by William Walsh against *The Mistress*, Cowley's name being significantly linked with Donne's :

He [Donne] affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where Nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of Love. In this (if I may be pardoned for so bold a truth) Mr. Cowley has copied him to a fault; so great a one, in my opinion, that it throws his Mistress infinitely below his Pindarics, and his latter compositions, which are doubtless the best of his poems, and the most correct ¹¹².

110. *Sylvae : or, the Second Part of Poetical Miscellanies*, 1685. Preface (Ker, *op. cit.*, p. 267, sq...).

111. He could still speak in the same breath, without any hint at any difference, of Pindar and Cowley (*Albion and Albanus*, an Opera, 1685. *The Preface*. Ker, *op. cit.*, p. 272).

112. *A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*. Dedicated to the Right Hon. Charles, Earl of Dorset and Middlesex. 1693 (Ker, *op. cit.*, II, p. 19).

That Dryden was not blind to the irregularity of the Cowleyan ode might be inferred from a letter to John Dennis (1693), in which he encouraged him to write in the pindaric strain (« introduced, but not perfected, by our famous Mr. Cowley »)... « and reduce it either to the same measures which Pindar used, or give new measures of your own » (E. Gosse. *Life of Congreve*, 1924, p. 147...). Gosse adds : « Dryden then saw much of Congreve », hinting that the two friends might have discussed the question together.

Thus Dryden began making a choice among the works of Cowley, his belief in the new principles conquering, though still with some diffidence and much timidity, his old faith, and he first excluded Cowley's most « metaphysical » collection, as contrary to Nature and Truth. And though his former taste was fighting with his ever-growing desire for correctness to the extent of keeping whole his admiration for the Odes, he gave the first intimations that he would prefer Cowley's last poems, where indeed the poet draws nearest to the classical pattern.

The same *Discourse* contained a passage in which later critics inclined to see a « death-blow » to Cowley. Dryden, pointing out the usefulness of « beautiful turns of words and thoughts » in satires as well as in heroic poems, found many instances of them in the poems of Waller and Denham. Then,

... I looked over the darling of my youth, the famous Cowley; there I found, instead of them, the points of wit, and quirks of epigram, even in the *Davideis*, an heroic poem, which is of an opposite nature to those puerilities; but no elegant turns either in the word or the thought...¹¹³.

This sounds indeed like a sweeping condemnation of Cowley's poetic style. The point, however, loses much of its keenness from the context, and when we find it stated that Dryden then consulted « a greater genius [Milton] without offence to the names of that noble author [Cowley] », and did it equally in vain, we may infer that Dryden did not aim at throwing Cowley down from his pedestal, but merely stated a fact, a rather painful one, in truth, though in no way impairing his genius. Yet, when calling him « the darling of my youth », he made it clear that he had, in part at least, outgrown his worship of the elder poet, and banished him among disused toys.

The criticism itself showed how wide was the gap growing between Cowley and the younger generation. For it went deeper than the moral attack of Elys and Stubbe or that of William Walsh, as deep as Addison's, down to the core of Cowley's talent, since the legitimacy of the conceit, the natural clothing of his wit, was now questioned.

113. *Ibid.* Ker, II, p. 108.

In a more general way, Dryden next regretted that Cowley had not written his poems with as much care and art as he might have done, and, while excusing him on account of the mishaps in his career, he accused him in fact of not having sufficiently mastered the English language :

... Without being injurious to the memory of our English Pindar, I will presume to say, that his metaphors are sometimes too violent, and his language is not always pure. But at the same time I must excuse him; for through the iniquity of the times he was forced to travel, at an age when, instead of learning foreign languages, he should have studied the beauties of his mother-tongue... thus, by gaining abroad, he lost at home... ¹¹⁴.

This passage is to be compared with that in which, twenty years earlier, he defended Cowley against the very same objections. A convert now to the neo-classical creed, he condemned « the strength of those images » which he had found so « beautiful » once, and was not presently far from calling « fustian ».

His evolution was to be brought to a close in his last year by the preface to the *Fables*. For this final statement, if not deliberately intended as a « death-blow », was at least meant to ring the knell of Cowley's literary fame :

One of our late poets is sunk in his reputation because he could never forgive any conceit which came in his way; but swept like a drag-net, great and small. There was plenty enough, but the dishes were ill-sorted, whole pyramids of sweetmeats for boys and women, but little of solid meat for men. All this proceeded not from any want of knowledge, but of judgment : neither did he want that in discerning the beauties and the faults of other poets, but only indulged himself in the luxury of writing; and perhaps knew it was a fault, but hoped the reader would not find it. For this reason, though he must always be thought a great poet, he is no longer esteemed a good writer; and for ten impressions which his works have had in so many successive years, yet at present a hundred books are scarcely purchased once a twelvemonth, for, as my last Lord Rochester said, though somewhat profanely, « not being of God, he could not stand... » ¹¹⁵.

114. *Dedication of the Aeneis*, 1697. To the most Honourable John, Lord Marquess of Normanby, Earl of Mulgrave... (Ker, *op. cit.*, II, p. 229). ... Yet, in the same *Dedication*, he declared his admiration for Cowley's talent as a translator of Virgil : « ... I say nothing of Sir John Denham, Mr. Waller and Mr. Cowley; 'tis the utmost of my ambition to be thought their equal, or not to be much inferior to them, and some others of the living... ».

115. Preface to the *Fables*, 1700 (Ker, *op. cit.*, II, p. 258).

There are two points of moment in this passage. First, Cowley found himself (though no names are mentioned, the description fits him too well not to apply to him) excluded from the Holy Land of neo-classicists, as lacking in judgment and self-restraint, two unpardonable faults. The woefully apt image of the « dragnet », the putting him down as an author for « boys and women », marked the culmination of Dryden's neo-classical criticism of Cowley's metaphysical verse, while the distinction « though he must always be thought a great poet, he is no longer esteemed a good writer », sharply drew the line between uncultivated native genius, and genius brought up and tended according to the rules of art.

The second assertion needs much qualification. Dryden stated that Cowley was « sunk in his reputation », and no longer read. What we have seen up to now rather points to the reverse conclusion : for Cowley by 1700 neither lacked admirers to comment enthusiastically on his works, nor readers to buy his large folios. The demand was as eager as ever, and the booksellers could advertise as follows the *Juvenilia* in the ninth edition :

The following Poems of *Mr. Cowley* being much enquired after, and very scarce (the Town hardly affording one Book, though it had been thrice Printed) we thought this Fourth Edition could not fail of being well received by the World... and sure there is no ingenuous Reader to whom the smallest remains of *Mr. Cowley* will be unwelcome... 116.

The history of Cowley's reputation during the next half-century hardly bears out Dryden's judgment. It was more of a prediction than an indisputable fact. It expressed no doubt the standpoint of the intellectual elite towards the end of the century : an artist who did not obey the dictates of the rules, who allowed his fancy to run away from him, who would not demur at a halting line or an unpolished phrase, provided his meaning was strikingly illustrated, might be by instinct and inspiration « a great poet », he could not be « a good writer »; and it was incomprehensible that he should still be admired. But this was the opinion of a very small minority.

116. *The Book-Sellers to the Reader*. In the second part to Cowley's folio edition of 1681.

Let us notice moreover that, transparent as the allusion was, Dryden did not mention the name of Cowley. He perhaps experienced pangs at so utterly condemning the man whom he had followed so long and praised so high. The conclusion he had gradually reached through his courageous work of investigation meant that his old master must no longer play the part of a master, and his taste, well-taught in the new discipline, made it a duty for him to denounce the danger of submitting to Cowley's influence. But, hard though they sound, his parting words seem to carry with them a lingering regret.

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And this is, on the whole, the impression we gather from the criticisms of men like Addison or Mulgrave. Their praise was enthusiastic, their censure reluctant, and diffident. They could not help admiring what they knew went against the Rules. Though their reason bade them condemn, they felt in the presence of a great poet and a lovable man. A sort of personal intimacy survived between the author and his readers, and even the younger generation could not escape the influence of him who had left such a deep impression upon their elders.

Some critics, and also some poets, had reached a point where they hesitated in calling Cowley their favourite author, and could no longer equally like all his works, but they were hardly followed by the reading public as yet. Moreover, they themselves hid their censures behind much louder eulogies, so that, except in Dryden's Prefaces, unfavourable criticisms of Cowley could scarcely be detected.

Among the public at large, unconcerned with the technicalities of neo-classical art, admiration continued as keen, and as generously given, as during Cowley's lifetime. To them he was the great poet of the period. They read him with gratification, and willingly paid the fourteen shillings Herringman asked for his folios¹¹⁷, they copied his poems in their commonplace-books, they recited and sang them. *The Mistress* shocked some, perhaps, but delighted the many, and those who objected to his lighter lyrics

¹¹⁷ *The Term Catalogues...* edited by Professor Edward Arber. London, 1903 (I, p. II, 99, etc...).

found their wishes fully answered in the high seriousness of the *Davideis* and the *Odes*.

Their attention was almost wholly centred on the poet in him, and it may be thought strange that the immediate forerunners of the pure classicists of the Augustan age should so devoutly applaud a metaphysical poet. It is the stranger, in fact, as Donne and his other disciples fared badly at their hands. Donne's works were edited only once after 1669, and the few mentions which were made concerning him in Aubrey, Phillips, Winstanley, or Wood, while acknowledging his « wit and learning », objected to his obscurity and harshness. He was no doubt better known as a churchman. So too were George Herbert and Crashaw ¹¹⁸.

The two rivals in fame Cowley then had were Cleveland and Quarles, but both were on the wane. No less than twenty editions of Cleveland had appeared before 1668, and new ones were called for in 1677, 1687, 1699. Wood as late as 1691, called him : « the most noted poet of this time ». But Dryden detested him, and he soon became a by-word for vicious taste. Phillips grew ironical at his expense when declaring :

So great a man hath Cleaveland been in the estimation of the generality, in regard his conceits were out of the common road, and wittily far-fetched, that grave men in outward appearance have not spared in my hearing to affirm him the best of English Poets : and let them think so still, who ever please, provided it be made no article of faith... ¹¹⁹.

As to Quarles, he remained popular, but the critics were all against him, and Edward Phillips dealt fiercely with him in his *Theatrum Poetarum*, despising him as « the darling of our plebeian judgements » ¹²⁰.

Towards the end of the period, Cowley remained alone as a public favourite. The reason for this exceptional treatment lies of course in the fact that, owing to his strangely complex character, he still fulfilled the aspirations of all but a very small number of readers. We have already insisted upon the intellectual atmos-

118. Cf. on the reputation of the « metaphysical poets » during the Seventeenth Century, A. H. Nethercot's article in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1924 (vol. XXIII, pp. 173-198).

119. Cf. Dryden's opinion in the *Dedication to the Aeneis*, and Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum* (II, p. 26-27).

120. Cf. A. H. Nethercot. *The Literary Legend of Francis Quarles* (*Modern Philology*, Feb. 1923, vol. XX, p. 225-240).

phere in which his poems are steeped. His wit was the outcome of his reasonings. His very enthusiasm might be traced to rational sources. So that, while he gratified the romantic desires lingering in men's minds by the ever-recurring flashes of his wit, he could gratify as well their new-born rational mood.

His enduring success proved that his readers had not yet passed out of the transitional stage. He might be termed a pre-classicist, but they were little more. Their classicism was more virtual than real, as yet fragile and superficial, hardly anything more than an aspiration for law and order. It could easily coexist with their love for a freedom which went against the rules, an enthusiasm which was the negation of order. They had only just begun to realize what requirements were now needed for the artist. Some of them grew aware that Cowley could no longer embody their ideal, and pointed out his more glaring faults. They were not conscious, however, of any antagonism, but merely felt they were parting with him, and leaving him behind, because they were going further than it had been possible for him to go. The difference was less a difference of nature than of degree.

Dryden alone, though he truly continued the work begun by Cowley, and thus remained to some extent his disciple, seemed, towards the end of his career, possessed with the feeling that it was a deep gulf indeed which severed him from Cowley. In his criticism of Cowley's conceits as opposed to « turns », in his comparison of his wit to a « drag-net », he showed the radically new attitude he had been led to adopt, and brought to light the essential antinomy that existed between metaphysical and classical poetry.

But this was only the seed from which the neo-classical attack on Cowley was to grow in the following period. In 1700, Cowley's reputation might be undermined and threatened in its very foundations, yet no sign of danger was visible on the surface, and his prospects of enduring fame seemed as firm and brilliant as ever.

CHAPTER III

THE AGE OF ADDISON AND POPE

The eighteenth century proved to be the most critical stage for the reputation of Cowley. Neo-classical writers commented on his works in obedience to Dryden's directions, and consequently denied him the rank of a first-class poet. Readers, attracted by better models, began falling off, until, by the middle of the century, the time was at hand when Cowley would definitely lose his position of a popular idol, and become the recondite author of a chosen few.

The new forces now triumphant could but lower his claims to fame. The voices of critics grew louder as their completer grasp of neo-classical principles showed them his faults more clearly. They gradually lost the tone of friendly respect so highly characteristic of the previous age, and hesitated no longer in damning his works as they thought they must be.

It would be wrong to think, however, that this change was sudden, or even clearly perceptible at the beginning of the period we are now going to study. The old enthusiasm showed at first little signs of decay, and Cowley's works were still read and still praised.

I

During the first quarter of the century, his books continued to sell, though not at the same rate as before — which was only to be expected, considering the date now reached —, yet with surprising activity. For, taking them from Herringman's hands,

Jacob Tonson issued in 1707 the tenth edition, in 1710 the eleventh, in 1721 the twelfth (neat octavo volumes now replacing the heavy folios). So that, when the Rev. Walter Harte exclaimed, towards 1730 :

What a run had Cowley's verses for about thirty years, the editions are innumerable. There has been no edition now for this long time¹, he clearly did not take these three editions into account.

By 1721, however, the demand apparently stopped, since the works of Cowley were not again collected as a whole, until Grosart issued his two volume edition in 1881. Even for a selection, we shall have to wait till 1772, the year of Richard Hurd's publication.

During the same period, his name was still used a lure by editors. In 1702, some letters he had written, while in France, to Henry Bennet, were published among Thomas Brown's *Miscellanea Aulica* and heralded as « Letters by the famous Mr. Cowley... »², and when the said Thomas Brown wrote his *Letters from the Dead to the Living*, he took good care to include one supposedly addressed by Cowley « to the Covent Garden Society »³.

John Dunton's periodical chose him as godfather, being called *The Post-Angel* after Cowley's lines in the hymn *To Light* :

Let a Post-Angel start with Thee,
And thou the Goal of Earth shalt reach as soon as he⁴.

In 1705, the *Naufragium Jocularé* was translated into English (probably by Charles Johnson) and christened anew : *Fortune in her Wits*. In 1723, Daniel Bellamy adapted *Love's Riddle* for the

1. Joseph Spence. *Anecdotes, Observations and Characters, of Books and Men*. Collected from the conversation of Mr. Pope and other eminent persons of his time... Now first published... by S. W. Singer. London, 1820, p. 339.

2. *Letters by the famous Mr. Abraham Cowley* (then Secretary to my Lord Jermyn), during Charles the Second's Exile : written from Paris to Mr. Henry Bennet, afterwards Earl of Arlington (*Miscellanea Aulica, or, A Collection of State Treatises never before published... Faithfully collected from their originals...* by Mr. Thomas Brown. London, 1702).

3. *Letters from the Dead to the Living*, by Mr. Thomas Brown, Captain Ayloffe, Mr. Henry Barker, etc... London, 1702.

4. *Hymn. To Light*, st. 6, I, p. 444.

use of school-girls, as *The Rival*, or *The Merry Swan Nymphs*, and his son again made use of the *Naufragium* in *The Perjur'd Devotee*; or, *The Force of Love* ⁵.

The Miscellany which is known as *Dryden's Miscellany*, included in 1716 several pieces by Cowley : *The Chronicle*, *An Ode written by Mr. Abraham Cowley for her Matie Queen to King Charles I*, *A Poem on the late Civil War*, *Brutus*, and the Earl of Mulgrave's answer to that poem ⁶. *The Chronicle* was published as a popular ballad, with the altered title : *Love's Chronicle*, or, *The Changing Heart* ⁷.

When Edward Bysshe ransacked the poets to gather a « Collection of the most natural and sublime Thoughts » for his *Art of English Poetry*, and later for his *British Parnassus*, Cowley was the first non-dramatic poet he borrowed from, and one of those from whom he borrowed most frequently (no less than one hundred and fifty quotations appearing in the former volume, to which were added fifty six more in the second, the extracts varying from two to over fifty lines) ⁸. In 1713, his works were also often resorted to for building up *The New Academy of Compliments*, and if he was excluded by Hayward from his *British Muse*, it was due, so the compiler said in his foreword, to his works being far too well known to be new ⁹.

Part of his *Discourse on Cromwell* was again used for political purposes at the end of a pamphlet called *A true and faithful Narrative of Cromwell's Compact with the Devil...*, under the title: *Verses written by Mr. Cowley soon after the death of Cromwell* ¹⁰,

5. Daniel Bellamy, Sr. and Jr. *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse...* London. 1741. The first was published in *The Young Ladies Miscellany : or Youth's Innocent and Rational Amusement*, 1723.

6. The ode to the Queen had been inserted in the third edition, as soon as 1702 (vol. II, p. 268), and *Brutus* in 1704 (vol. V, p. 415).

7. To be found as a broadside among the *Roxburghe Ballads* (Circa 1730).

8. *The Art of English Poetry...* By Edward Bysshe... London, 1702. — *The British Parnassus : or, a compleat Common-place Book of English Poetry...* By Edward Bysshe... London, 1714.

9. *The New Academy of Complements...* Compiled by L. B., Sir C. S., Sir W. D., and others the most refined wits of this Age. London..., 1713. — *The British Muse. Or, a Collection of Thoughts, moral, natural, and sublime, of our English Poets...* By Thomas Hayward... London, 1738.

10. *A True and faithful Narrative of Cromwell's Compact with the Devil...* The second edition... London, 1720.

and the whole *Discourse* was reprinted in the *Harleian Miscellany* ¹¹.

A further proof might be adduced from the occasional revival of his comedies in London theatres ¹², though, as a playwright, he never attained any degree of fame.

These facts afford sufficient evidence that Cowley was far from being considered by publishers as « sunk in his reputation ».

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In truth, he continued to hold the rank of a favourite with many readers of every description. Writers, for instance, hardly saw a better means of praising the poems of their friends or patrons, or even of justifying their own productions, than by comparing them to Cowley's. The editor of *The Post-Angel*, in order to vindicate his printing two odes on his own venture, described them as « not inferior to any poem you find in Cowley », obviously looking up to him as to the best standard by which one might judge ¹³.

Samuel Wesley's heroic poem, *The Life of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus-Christ*, was exalted by being set on a level with the *Davideis* ¹⁴. Nicholas Rowe, dedicating his works to the Earl of Warwick, paid him the compliment of using, to speak of him, Cowley's own words :

I may very justly say of you, my Lord, what Mr. Cowley said of his friend Mr. Harvey :

He lov'd my worthless Verse, and like a Friend
Would find out something to commend ¹⁵.

Such members of the literary profession as Thomas Brown or John Dunton strewed their writings with reminiscences from

11. *The Harleian Miscellany*, 1745 (ed. 1810, vol. V, p. 524, sq...).

12. *The Cutter of Coleman Street* was revived on October 5, 1702, August 1, 1711-12, November 1, 1723-24 (Cf. J. Genest. *Some Account of the English Stage...* Bath. 1832, II, p. 262, 500; III, p. 142. Cf. also A. H. Nethercot. *The Reputation of Abraham Cowley...*, p. 614.

13. *The Post-Angel, or Universal Entertainment...* June 1701 (vol. I, p. 396).

14. *The Post-Angel*, July 1701 (vol. II, p. 63).

15. *The Dramatick Works of Nicholas Rowe...* London, 1720.

Cowley, and praised him as the English Pindar and Virgil, whose precocious talent struck his readers with wonder¹⁶. The poet also found devotees among the gentry. The Hervey family cherished the memory of the beautiful elegy he had written on the death of his friend William, and recalled it as a « comfortable cordial » on occasions of distress, while the ladies of the house were still in the habit of reading him¹⁷. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, when she was nineteen, took argument from Cowley's dislike for grammatical rules to avoid learning them herself. More than forty-five years later, she had remained true to her youthful admiration for the poet, read his *Mistress*, and quoted from it¹⁸.

Many readers retained much affectionate feeling for Cowley as a man. Joshua Barnes, in duty bound to mention him in his edition of Anacreon, called him « Couleius noster », and emphasized the contrast between the light matter of his poetry and the virtuous simplicity of his life¹⁹. The antiquarian Thomas Hearne preserved a personal touch with the poet, regarding him as « a good-natured man, of great candour and humanity »²⁰.

A contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* wrote an Apotheosis

16. Cf. T. Brown : *Works*. ed. 1730, vol. II, p. 125, 154; III, p. 237, 279; IV, p. 250... Cf. J. Dunton : *The Life and Errors of John Dunton, late citizen of London*. Written by himself in solitude... 1705 (1818 ed., p. 85, 231, 239, 288, 441, 513, 585...). Dunton's lines are to be found in a poem on « The dissenting Doctors » (*Works*, II, p. 723, quoted by A. H. Nethercot in *The Reputation of the « Metaphysical Poets » during the Age of Pope*. *Philological Quarterly*. 1925, vol. IV, p. 163).

17. *Letter-books of John Hervey, first Earl of Bristol, with Sir Thomas Hervey's Letters during courtship and Poems during widowhood*. 1651 to 1750. Wells, 1894. Cf. letters from January 29, 1712 (I, p. 318), August 30 1727 (III, p. 20) and April 29 1715 (II, p. 2), this last one saying : « ... My mental counterpart, Lady Ann, is now sitting by me reading of Cowley... »

18. She argued the first point in two letters, dated August 20 1709 and August 21 (*The Works of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*... The 5th ed. London, 1805, I, p. 115-119). In a letter to the Countess of Bute (September 22, 1795), she quoted *The Despair* (*Works*, IV, p. 264).

19. *Anacreon Teius, Poeta Lyricus*... Editio altera. Cantab. 1721.

20. *Remarks and Collections by Thomas Hearne*. Edited by C. E. Doble (Oxford Historical Society Publications), vol. I, 1885, p. 246. — Hearne also knew Cowley's works well : cf. an allusion to the preface to *Cutter* (*ibid.*), to the autograph transcription of the ode in the 1656 volume given to the Bodleian library by the poet, and to the « disloyal » passage in the preface to that book (*ibid.*, III, p. 415). His ode to Brutus and his subsequent disgrace were recalled in *The Judgment of Dr. Prideaux, in condemning the murder of Julius Caesar by the conspirators as a most villanous act, maintained*... London, 1721.

of Milton, where the poets, assembled in Westminster Abbey, discussed the admission of Milton among them. He depicted Cowley, with obvious sympathy and love :

... I perceived a personage about forty years of age, of a delicate complection and thoughtful aspect, who took his seat near Spencer : his fine hair, which waved in ringlets about his shoulders, his flowing robe and modest air, put me in mind of one of Plato's disciples, as represented by the great Raphael in his School of Athens : and what still raised him in my idea, was that the most distinguish'd of the company regarded him with a mixture of indulgence and wonder.

When he spoke — against Milton, on account of his political activities :

... At first his air was modest, if not bashful; but, as he proceeded, he gathered assurance, till at last he rose into a great dignity, both of action and language...²¹.

Another article in the same magazine deplored, not without indignation, the poet's epitaph in Westminster Abbey, as idolatrous and unworthy « a man whose learning and poetry were his lowest merits »²².

Aaron Hill devised a pastoral dialogue « concerning the preference of a town life to a country life », and both shepherds spoke with respect of Cowley, Damon calling him « that shining bard », and Philemon praising « immortal Cowley's tuneful verse »²³.

All literary men knew him, of course, and most loved him as a friend; John Dunton, for instance, when he sought for literary inducements to lead a virtuous life, recommended the reading of Milton's and Cowley's religious epics, and, when he withdrew from the world, took the *Essays* with him²⁴.

Prior looked up to him as the best guide in love with Waller :

My Cowley and Waller how vainly I quote
While my negligent judge only hears with her eye !²⁵.

21. *The Apotheosis of Milton. Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1738 and February 1739 (vol. VIII, p. 469... and IX, p. 74...).

22. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, December, 1740 (vol. X, p. 594).

23. *The Works of the late Aaron Hill, Esq.* London, 1753 (III, p. 270).

24. *The Life and Errors of John Dunton*... London, 1705 (1818 ed. p. 56..., p. 513, 585...).

25. *A Case stated. The Poetical Works of Matthew Prior*. A new edition. London, 1892 (II, p. 271).

Edward Young alluded to the warning Cowley gave in the essay : *On the Danger of Procrastination* : « There's no fooling with Life, when it is once turn'd beyond Forty »²⁶. One of Fitzosborne's letters contained, in 1743, this reminiscence :

It has been observed (and, I think by Cowley), that a man in much business must either make himself a knave, or the world will make him a fool...²⁷.

Cowley's true popularity was nowhere better exhibited than in the great periodical of Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*. Allusions or quotations were derived from every part of his works : the *Miscellanies* (Addison alluded to his definition of wit, to the *Chronicle*, to the final conceit in the *Anacreontic Beauty*, with which he declared himself delighted)²⁸; *The Mistress* (Steele quoted the fourth stanza of *The Waiting-Maid*)²⁹, the *Dauides* (Addison humorously recollected an image and mentioned his definition of Eternity)³⁰; the *Pindaric Odes* (Addison praised « the admirable line by which Cowley describes the destruction of the Universe » in *The Resurrection*)³¹. Nor were the prose works neglected : Budgell quoted Cowley's opinion on dancing, as expressed in the *Proposition*; the preface to the 1656 volume was mentioned, the *Epitaphium Vivi Auctoris* transcribed and duly extolled by Addison, « as an instruction how to leave the public with a good grace »³².

Most interesting and significant of all were the reminiscences from the *Essays : the Danger of Procrastination, Of Solitude, Of Myself*, the poem annexed to the essay *Of Agriculture : The Country Life*, were in turn borrowed from and praised³³. Such allusions were no doubt most useful in bringing this part of Cowley's work to the front. It was only natural, besides, when the perio-

26. *Satire II*, l. 281 (Quoted by Walter Thomas. *Le poète Edward Young...* Paris, 1901, p. 272).

27. *Fitzosborne's Letters on several subjects*, by the late William Melmoth, Esq. A new edition, London, 1805, p. 184.

28. Cf. number 35, 311, 377.

29. Cf. N° 41.

30. Cf. N° 81, 590.

31. Cf. N° 166.

32. Cf. N° 67, 632.

33. Cf. N° 123 and 379, 406, 562, 610 and 613.

dical essay was launched on its triumphant career, that these should attract attention, and having once attracted it, they could not fail retaining it for ever. Not that they were unknown, even before the writers in the *Spectator* mentioned them. For John Dunton had freely used them as early as 1705 and gratefully acknowledged his obligations to them, and the *Athenian Oracle* had discussed in 1704 Cowley's praise of Epicure³⁴. But they were now set in full light by the warm recommendation of such influential men as Addison and Steele.

It may therefore be asserted that Cowley enjoyed the posthumous friendship of the most eminent men of the age : Swift, Prior, Addison, Steele, and, as we shall see later, Pope, expressed their affection for him. Perhaps the greatest friend he acquired at this time was Richardson. The novelist, besides frequently alluding to Cowley or quoting from his works, praised him, briefly but significantly, in *Pamela*, through lady Davers's words:

... Cowley, replied my lady, is my favourite poet : he has a beautiful imagination, a vast deal of wit, of brilliant wit, and a chastity too in most of his pieces that hardly any of the tribe can boast...³⁵.

Aaron Hill, writing to Richardson, expressed his high regard for the poet. If you want to know whom to choose as your friends, he said, let them read the works of Milton and Cowley. Those who, « in the famed popularity of the first could lose sight of his malice and wickedness » are not to be trusted. But one can place one's confidence in the man who, « in contempt of the fashion we are fallen into, of decrying the works of the second, could have courage to declare himself charmed, by both the Muse and the Man, in that writer »³⁶. A judgment in which Richardson heartily concurred when he wrote to Miss Highmore, in June 1750 :

34. *The Lover*, N° 40 also alluded to the essay on *The Danger of Procrastination*, and called Cowley « a very learned man ».

35. *Pamela*, III, 221. Cf. several quotations and allusions, in *Pamela*, III, 223, 228, 351. *Clarissa*, I, l. 31; IV, l. 36, 56... The texts are taken from *The Mistress (The Thief, The Concealment, Beauty, The Bargain)*, the *Pindaric Odes (Destiny)*, the *Miscellanies (Of Wit)*, the *Essays (Of Greatness)*. For Richardson's indebtedness to Cowley, cf. Erich Poetzsch's study : *Samuel Richardson's Belesenheit (Kieler Studien zur Englischen Philologie, Kiel, 1908)*. Cf. also P. Dottin's book : *Samuel Richardson*. Paris, 1931 (p. 39, 49, 297).

36. *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*... Selected from the original manuscripts... By Anna Laetitia Barbauld... London, 1804 (I, p. 2. The letter is dated June 1. 1730).

... I am glad that Cowley takes his turn with you. Cowley has great merit with me; and the greater, as he is out of fashion in this age of taste. And yet I wonder he is so absolutely neglected, as he wants not point and turn, and wit, and fancy, and an imagination very brilliant : nor puts a reader to vast trouble to understand him — a great matter in this age of dictionary and index learning, in which our study is to get knowledge without study (if I may so express myself), and a smattering is almost all that is aimed at... 37.

By 1750 Cowley still found readers, and, what is more, staunch admirers. But he must now be reclaimed from incipient neglect; such cumulative evidence as that produced by Harte, Hill, and Richardson cannot be ignored. Cowley's best friends had to confess that their numbers were dwindling down, and that Cowley had now grown old-fashioned. Though he was still to them « a favourite poet », and still held an eminent position in English letters, too fundamental changes had occurred since his death for him to be called any more by the name of the « prince of poets ». Writers like Dryden, Pope, or the *Spectator* essayists, had risen to fame in their turn, and, in more complete agreement with the taste now prevalent, gratified the desires of their contemporaries much better than Cowley could do. He therefore slowly retreated, not yet into the background of the literary stage, but amongst the secondary writers who might be cherished by some while no longer attracting by their talent the attention of all.

*
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Meanwhile poets continued to obey him as a master and leader. When Prior determined to write a heroic poem on Solomon, he took up his position as a disciple of Cowley's, though without naming him. He explained, in his preface : « In my description I have endeavoured to keep to the notions and manners of the Jewish nation, at the time when Solomon lived... », thereby attempting the same kind of resurrection of a dead civilization which was to be found in the *Davideis*, and he effected it, just as Cowley had done before him, by borrowing from the customs and manners of eastern countries to make up a complete picture

37. *Ibid.*, II, p. 229 (Dated June 4, 1750).

of Jewish life. The example of Cowley was so much in his mind that he seemed unable to break free from his very words. His preface opens much like the essay *Of Myself* : « It is hard for a man to speak of himself with any tolerable satisfaction or success... it is harder for him to speak of his own writings... »³⁸. He no doubt also led Bishop Ken towards epic poetry, through his plea for Christian poetry, and the example he had shown in the *Davideis*³⁹.

Pope, as we shall see later, submitted to his guidance at first, and wrote professed imitations of his poems. William Pattison, a minor poet, and a lover of solitude, chose him for his master, together with Milton⁴⁰. And he loved Cowley so much that he had called his favourite walk « Cowley's walk », because it reminded him of one of the poet's descriptions⁴¹. Thomas Brown feebly tried to ape his love poems⁴². His *Miscellanies* were also plundered, and *Friendship in Absence* was closely copied in a poem *On Absence*⁴³.

But most of his disciples more specifically followed him, as before, in the pindaric track. To number them all would be an almost impossible, and in any case a barren, task, since most are fallen into a deserved oblivion. A few notable examples may

38. *Solomon, or The Vanity of the World. A Poem in Three Books* (*The Writings of Matthew Prior*, edited by A. R. Waller. Cambridge, 1905, I, p. 254...).

39. Edmund. *An Epic poem* (*The Works of the Right Reverend, learned and pious Thomas Ken, D. D.*... London, 1721, vol. II).

40. *The Poetical Works of William Pattison*, to which is prefixed the Life of the author. Edinburgh, 1794 (Anderson's *Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain*, VIII, p. 555...).

41. The fact is recorded by Isaac Disraeli in *Calamities and Quarrels of Authors*, p. 99.

42. *Upon Love. In Imitation of Cowley* (*Works*, ed. 1720-1, V, p. 23).

43. *Poems upon several Occasions : together with some Odes in imitation of Mr. Cowley's stile and manner*. London, 1703, p. 90, and 103. — Cowley had said :

When chance or cruel business parts us two,
What do our Souls I wonder do ?
Whilst sleep does our dull Bodies tie
Methinks, at home they should not stay...

The poem *On Absence* echoed :

My dear, when Chance divides us two,
I wonder what our spirits do;
In sleep methinks they should not rest,
But aim to be more greatly bless'd.

suffice to prove that the vogue of these irregular odes had not in the least abated.

A collection entitled : *Poems on several Occasions : together with some Odes in imitation of Mr. Cowley's Stile and Manner* (1703), included a number of Pindarics, the first of which faithfully reproduced the opening lines of the ode *Christs Passion*.

My Muse for tow'ring flights prepare,
The Theam is worthy all thy care;
Let me no languid heats receive,
Thou must thy noblest Inspirations give...

Another miscellany, published in 1722, included an ode on Dryden's death which echoed the beginning of the *Second Olym-pique ode* :

Say, pregnant Muse !
What wondrous subject wilt thou choose ?
What godlike heroe, or what mighty King
Wilt thou in lofty numbers sing ?... 44.

Samuel Cobb, in a *Pindaric Ode*, sang the triumph of Cowley and Prior, his pupil, in *Carmen Seculare* ⁴⁵. William Collins, while composing regularly divided odes (*To Fear, To Liberty*), or odes with short stanzas (*To Evening*), wrote *The Passions*, an irregular ode in the manner of Cowley ⁴⁶. De Foe turned it for the first time to satiric use in his *Hymn to the Pillory* (1703), and among other pindarists of the age we find the names of John Hughes, Elijah Fenton, Isaac Watts, Savage, Hamilton, and Shenstone, who wrote in 1749 *An irregular Ode after Sickness* ⁴⁷.

One of the most convinced pindarists was Aaron Hill, who devoted an ode to Cowley's discovery, beginning :

Sacred Soul, harmonious Swan !
Whose sweetest notes long before death began;
And the long tuneful race unwearied ran...

How... in this toilsome Age,
Did'st thou, immortal man ! when Arts were overthrown,

44. *Miscellany Poems on several subjects*. London, 1722, p. 91.

45. Samuel Cobb. *Poems...* 1707 (in J. Nichols. *A Select Collection of Poems...* 1781, I, p. 242).

46. *The Poems of William Collins*. Edited... by W. C. Bronson. Boston, 1898.

47. Cf. Schipper. *Englische Metrik*, II, p. 811, for these imitations.

And whole Parnassus tumbled down,
Stand on its ruins, and erect a new one of thy own ?...

Though Hill perceived blemishes in his works, he excused them by stating that nothing is perfect : the sun itself has spots.

So thou, great King of Fancy ! led astray
By thy high mettled Muse, uncurb'd and gay,
And prancing proudly on, in wit's unmeasur'd way,
Hast err'd in judgment, where thou didst design
Thy judgment most should shine !

And his ultimate verdict was summed up in this worshipping line :

But all that's human in thy verse, is lost in the divine ⁴⁸.

Thus Hill kept up the sacred flame of admiration at Cowley's altar. But indeed he was one of the last upholders of the Cowleyan Pindaric ode, for though irregular odes were written as late as the mid-nineteenth century, they can scarcely be called Cowleyan, the « lawless » form alone being retained, and each writer following freely his own taste.

II

As was to be expected, in proportion as the neo-classical movement gathered strength and boldness, such a prominent figure of the seventeenth century school of verse as Cowley suffered further at the hands of new-comers who judged by the rules of art, unhampered by any tradition of friendliness or respect towards him. Neo-classical criticism exerted its influence, as forcibly as was compatible with the recognition of his true merits, against him. Proposing better models, and actively scrutinizing his faults, the critics of the age pursued the destructive policy tentatively begun by Dryden.

A noteworthy feature of this criticism, however, is that, while the tide of unfavourable remarks kept steadily increasing, the old tone of admiration was preserved by not a few critics. Cowley

48. *The Poetical Works of Aaron Hill, Esq.* (Anderson's *British Poets*, VIII, p. 686).

enthusiasts remained faithful to him, and continued the established tradition of praise as if neither Dryden or Addison, nor any neo-classical critic had ever drawn attention to his errors.



He continued to be given resounding names, and to be held up as an unexceptionable pattern. One called him « our famous English bard »⁴⁹, another « the great Cowley »⁵⁰. Leonard Welsted spoke of « Cowley's precious stone » in Westminster Abbey⁵¹. « A gentleman of Oxford » assured him of immortality :

Immortal wreaths on Cowley's Brow shall sit,
To show the Spring of inexhausted Wit⁵².

The two champions Cowley found most active in his favour were Henry Felton and Giles Jacob. Dr. Felton, when comparing, as was then the fashion, the merits of ancient and modern poets, felt amazed at the unique versatility of Cowley's genius :

... While Rome hath been content to produce single rivals to the Grecian poetry, England hath brought forth the wonderful Cowley's wit, who was beloved by every Muse he courted, and hath rivalled the Greek and latin Poets in every kind but tragedy.

Writing Pindarics was « a dangerous enterprize » unfit for « weak heads ». Cowley alone had succeeded in it :

49. *A Compleat History of Europe...* London, 1706, IV, p. 558.

50. John Dunton, *Life and Errors*, p. 585.

51. *On the Death of John Philips (The Works of Leonard Welsted*. London, 1787, p. 24).

52. *The Grove, or a Collection of Original Poems*. London, 1721 : *In imitation of the 15th Elegy of Ovid*, lib. I Amor., by a Gentleman of Oxford, p. 106. Cf. also *Dodsley's Museum : or, the Literary and Historical Register...* London, 1747 (III, p. 483 : Cowley is celebrated as a « wit »); *The Englishman*, N° 7 (from Saturday, October 17 to Tuesday, October 20, 1713 : Cowley is named with Waller as a representative of the moderns).

These feelings were echoed on the Continent. In France, for instance, Baillet (*Jugemens des Savants*, IV, pt. II, 1725, p. 613) said : « ... Les principaux Poètes des Isles Britanniques en Langue Vulgaire, selon les auteurs que j'ai déjà cités, sont Abraham Cowley, John Downe ou Jean Donne, Cleveland, Edmond Waller, Jean Fletcher, Beaumont, Ben Johnson, Suckling, Jean Milton, etc. ». Cf. also *Journal littéraire de La Haye*, 1717, Pt. I, Art. X, p. 216, where Cowley is ranked among the « beaux génies du temps de Charles II ».

But then, he was a genius equal to his author : he hath no sentiment but what naturally rises from the original, and is every way worthy the Theban poet to have thought and sung...

As an artist, however, Felton did not wholly approve of him. His English style and versification seemed to him, curiously enough, inferior to his Latin achievements. Whereas « none wrote more masterly in latin »,

no poet was less curious in the words and cadence of his verse in English : his words flowed rather from Nature than Art; and when they appear most to be studied, they appear at the same time to be most affected, as when he endeavours to please too much.

Here Felton stopped, afraid at his own boldness, and tried to vindicate Cowley from his own criticism :

I speak not this in the way of censure on this admirable poet; I take his carelessness of his numbers to be an argument of his genius, which was too great to attend to the minute parts of a composition, and he was sure to please with all his faults...

And he concluded that, Nature gaining a victory over Art, his English were superior to his Latin writings ⁵³.

As to Giles Jacob, he duly admired, as Sprat had done before him, the variety of Cowley's Latin style, the sublimity of the *Davideis*, and called him « our English Pindar » ⁵⁴. When defining the Pindaric ode, he pointed out its difficulty and dangers, adding, this time after Dryden's words :

This poem has been introduced into our language by the happy genius of Mr. Cowley, and is fit for great and noble subjects, such as are boundless as its own numbers ⁵⁵.

Nor were they alone in their support of Cowley. One of the self-styled oracles of taste, in an argument concerning the artistic value of religious poetry, brought forward the *Davideis* and the

53. *A Dissertation on reading the Classics, and forming a just Style*. Written in the year 1709... by H. Felton... (The second edition, with large additions, London, 1715, p. 31, 168..., 202...).

54. *The Poetical Register. Or, the Lives and Characters of all the English Poets, with an Account of their Writings*. London, 1719, II, pt. II, p. 251.

55. *Ibid. Introductory Essay on the Rise, Progress, Beauty, etc., of all sorts of poetry*, II, p. xxii.

Odes as proof that religious themes might be productive of true poetry :

Divinity itself almost seems more divine :
 Its charms so numerous and resistless prove,
 We know not which we first should love,
 Whether immortal Cowley does rehearse
 His hero in immortal Verse;
 Or bolder in greater Pindar's footsteps move,
 From cloud to cloud still fearless rove,
 Nor stops till at the glittering walls of Jove :
 To light itself new light he brings,
 Like the great Spirit, o'er Chaos spreads his wings,
 Loud, as the Cherubs trump, the Resurrection sings ⁵⁶.

The schoolmaster John Brightland inveighed against the many « ignorant imitators » who, taking argument of « the supposed irregularity of Pindar's numbers pretend to be Pindaric poets by their wild irregular verses only ». But the attack does not in the least concern Cowley, and Brightland later invoked him as an instance of felicitous composition ⁵⁷. John Strype, when he described Cowley's tomb in Westminster Abbey, could not refrain from adding to his catalogue : « his Pindaric odes are most sweet and divine » ⁵⁸. The translator of the *Naufragium Joculare*, in his preface, praised Cowley's paraphrases and mentioned him as having always been « a particular favourite of the ladies » ⁵⁹; and as late as 1749 *The Mistress* and the *Davideis* found earnest advocates ⁶⁰.

Even amongst Cowley's admirers, however, doubts were fast creeping in, and, the new spirit forcing its way through the traditional

56. *The Athenian Oracle : being an entire Collection of all the valuable questions and answers in the old Athenian Mercuries...* by a member of the Athenian Society. The second edition, more correct... London, 1704 (I, p. 269).

57. *A Grammar of the English Tongue...* the second edition... London, 1712 (p. 140-145).

58. *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster...* Written at first in the year 1598 by John Stow... Since reprinted and augmented by the author... Now lastly improved and very much enlarged... By John Strype... London, 1720 (II, p. 16).

59. *Fortune in her Wits. A Comedy...* London, 1705. Preface.

60. *Scanderberg : or, Love and Liberty. A Tragedy written by the late Thomas Whincop, Esq.* To which are now added a list of all the dramatic authors with some account of their Lives... London, 1747 (p. 101-103).

enthusiasm, objections were raised against the more vulnerable parts of his work.

John Dennis, while admiring the *Davideis*, and the manner in which God is made to speak by Cowley, reproduced Rymer's censure on the use of the supernatural in his epic, and found fault with the lack of « inclinations and affections » of his divine characters ⁶¹.

Leonard Welsted voiced the protest of reasonable men against what might be called alexandrinism in Cowley :

That great poet had so luxuriant a fancy, that I can compare him to nothing more properly than a too rich soil, which breeds flowers and weeds promiscuously, and exerts itself with so great an exuberance that at length it becomes barren through its fertility. His beauties crowd so thick upon one another, that they lose distinction...

Yet his conclusion was :

If Cowley falls short of Milton in the sublime, he exceeds him in the number of his conceits. If he is not so strong, so just, so musical as Dryden, he has greater opulence and variety ⁶².

William Coward set Cowley before Cleveland, on a level with Waller and Dryden for the beauty of his descriptions, but when he came to speak of the choice of epithets, he had to confess that Cowley's sublimity did no longer satisfy his taste, and that the reasonable moderation of Waller was more congenial to him :

Waller and Cowley had this happy fate,
To be, beyond imagination, great,
Tho' Cowley's numbers oft have soar'd too high,
Attempting in too lofty strains to fly,
Whilst Waller, in more equal measure sings,
And shares the medium with more level wings ⁶³.

61. *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, contained in some new Discoveries never made before requisite for the writing and judging of poems surely...* London, 1704 (p. 61, 114, 145...).

62. *The Works in verse and prose of Leonard Welsted, Esq.* Now first collected. With historical notes, and biographical Memoirs of the author; by John Nichols. London, 1787 (p. 413).

63. *Licentia Poetica discuss'd : or, the true test of poetry.* Without which it is difficult to judge of, or compose, a correct English poem. To which are added critical observations on the principal, antient and modern poets, viz. Homer, Horace, Virgil, Milton, Waller, Cowley, Dryden, etc... as frequently liable to just censure. A Poem... London, 1709 (p. 28,32).

It is quite characteristic of the age to mix praise and censure in so perplexing a manner, that it is often difficult to decide what attitude the critic would ultimately adopt.

It follows that great caution must be exercised before calling a critic adverse to Cowley. Many later commentators, for instance, have understood Congreve's onslaught on Pindarics as directly aimed at Cowley. Congreve actually denounced their irregularity, in his *Discourse on the Pindaric Ode* :

The character of these late Pindariques is a bundle of rambling incoherent thoughts, express'd in a like parcel of irregular stanzas, which also consist of such another complication of disproportion'd, uncertain, and perplex'd verses and rhimes...;

but his indictment did not in the least apply to Cowley's Odes. Not only does his name not appear in it, but when, a few pages later, Congreve happened to quote the poet's dictum that music is an essential part of odes, he delivered his opinion of him in terms of undisguised admiration and respect :

But there is that great deference due to the memory, great parts and learning of that gentleman, that I think nothing should be objected to the latitude he has taken in his Pindarique Odes. The beauty of his verses are an attonement for the irregularity of his stanzas: and though he did not imitate Pindar in the strictness of his numbers, he has very often happily copy'd him in the force of his figures, and sublimity of his stile and sentiments.

Thus, instead of censuring Cowley, Congreve revered and praised him. He made it, besides, perfectly clear, that not his odes but those of his imitators, were to blame, Cowley merely bearing the responsibility of having allured many a poetaster into writing Pindaric odes :

... Yet I must beg leave to add, that I believe those irregular Odes of Mr. Cowley, may have been the principal, though innocent occasion, of so many deformed poems since...⁶⁴.

64. *A Discourse on the Pindarique Ode*. Prefixed to a Pindarique Ode, humbly offer'd to the Queen on the victorious progress of Her Majesty's Arms, under the Conduct of the Duke of Marlborough (The Third Volume of the *Works of Mr. William Congreve*... London, 1710, p. 1074, 1080).

Thomas Brown duly jotted the fact in his *Commonplace-book* : « Cowley falsely represents Pindar as irregular ». *Mr. T. Browns pocket-book of Commonplace* (Works, 1720 ed. III, p. 269).

Addison also arraigned Pindarics. Pindar, he said...

... was hurried on by a natural fire and impetuosity to vast conceptions of things, and noble sallies of imagination. At the same time, can anything be more ridiculous than for men of a sober and moderate fancy to imitate this poet's way of writing in those monstrous compositions which go among us under the name of Pindaricks... ? ⁶⁵.

But here again Cowley was not mentioned and, probably enough, not included in this sharp censure, though he might truly be deemed a man « of a sober and moderate fancy ».



The first unmistakable criticism Addison wrote upon Cowley is to be found in his famous paper on « *Mixt Wit* ». There indeed Cowley was named, and his wit formally « anatomized ». Starting from Locke's definition of this quality, Addison distinguished « true Wit », « the resemblance and continuity of ideas », from « false Wit », consisting in merely outward resemblances, whether of letters, syllables, words, sentences, or poems. Pursuing his analysis, he reached a further distinction :

There is another Kind of Wit which consists partly in the Resemblance of Ideas, and partly in the Resemblance of Words; which for Distinction Sake I shall call *mixt Wit*. This Kind of Wit is that which abounds in Cowley more than in any Author that ever wrote...

There followed a page of ruthless dissection of the conceits, so numerous in *The Mistress*, based on a voluntary confusion of the metaphorical flames of Love and real fire. A most damaging page for Cowley's fame, if we think of the success and influence of Addison's periodical. The more so, perhaps, if one omitted reading the final paragraph where Addison tried to retrieve part of the harm he had just caused, by expressing his sincere regard for the poet's genius :

I cannot conclude this head of *mixt Wit*, without owning that the admirable poet out of whom I have taken the Examples of it, had as

65. *The Spectator*, n° 160 (September 3. 1711).

much true Wit as any Author that ever writ; and indeed all other Talents of an extraordinary Genius ⁶⁶.

Ten days later he again insisted upon the value of simple, level thoughts :

I know nothing which more shews the essential and inherent Perfection of Simplicity of Thought, above that which I call the Gothick Manner in Writing, than this, that the first pleases all Kinds of Palates, and the latter only such as have formed to themselves a wrong artificial Taste upon little fanciful Authors and Writers of Epigram. *Homer*, *Virgil*, or *Milton*, so far as the Language of their Poems is understood, will please a Reader of plain common Sense, who would neither relish nor comprehend an epigram of *Martial*, or a Poem of *Cowley* ⁶⁷.

With this criticism we may be said to have reached at once the centre of neo-classical thought on Cowley considered as a metaphysical poet. It expresses at the same time admiration and distrust. Too keenly aware of intellectual eminence not to wonder at the wealth and acuteness of thought profusely spread over Cowley's verse, Addison had become too mature and steady to endure his riotous conceits, his « improprieties of thoughts and words », his far-fetched *à peu près*. His love poems shocked the neo-classical temper because they too often set truth and probability at defiance : they did not bear the test of « Nature ». Cowley's poetical style deserved to be called « Gothic ». And the use of such a word in relation with it showed how low it had fallen in the estimation of orthodox-minded judges, if we remember that neo-classicists meant to express through it all that they abominated in the art and literature of past centuries. Obviously, an age of plain common-sense was not ready to relish his « metaphysical » gymnastics. And to would-be poets, no model could be more dangerous, as Steele pointed out when he wrote :

The admirers of what we call point, or turn, look upon it as the peculiar happiness to which Cowley, Ovid, and others owe their reputation, and therefore endeavour to imitate them only in such instances... ⁶⁸.

66. *Spectator*, N° 62, May 11, 1711. Addison, was keenly aware of the beauty of the *Anacreontics*, as he witnessed in the Preface to his own translations from Anacreon.

67. *Spectator*, N° 70 (May 21. 1711).

68. *Spectator*, N° 140 (August 10. 1711).

Those judgments were given further emphasis in *The Guardian* for March 1713, when the author of a letter on Song-writing asserted that the English song-makers « crowd into one song materials enough for several », and quoted Waller as an instance. He then added :

But of all our countrymen none are more defective in their songs, through a redundancy of wit, than Dr. Donne and Mr. Cowley. In them one point of wit flashes so fast upon another, that the reader's attention is dazzled by the continual sparkling of their imagination; you find a new design started almost in every line, and you come to the end without the satisfaction of seeing any one of them executed ⁶⁹.

And *The Mistress* was treated ironically in *The Lover* for April 1714, Cowley's teaching of love being declared inefficient, though « very much in vogue among the ladies... » ⁷⁰.

By that time the tide of neo-classicism was at the full, and Cowley was steadily losing ground. The successive emendations in the Earl of Mulgrave's *Essay on Poetry* may serve to illustrate this ebbing of Cowley's fame as a poet. The 1682 edition had placed him among the greatest heroic poets, on a level with Milton, Tasso and Spenser. But in 1713 and 1723, his name no longer figured on the list. Moreover, the censure, mild at first, became more insistent. Whereas, in 1682, Mulgrave had said :

But ill expression gives too great Allay
To that rich Fancy which can ne're decay;

the later text ran :

But sometimes diction mean, or verse ill-wrought,
Deadens, or clouds, his noble frame of thought ⁷¹.

A similar evolution was taking place in Charles Gildon. He had in 1694 vigorously defended *The Mistress* against the attack of William Walsh. In 1718, while giving Cowley his modicum

69. *The Guardian*, N° 16 (Reprinted in *The British Essayists...* By A. Chalmers... London... 1823 (vol. XIII).

70. *The Lover*, N° 23 (April 17. 1714).

71. *The Poems of John Sheffield, duke of Buckinghamshire* (Chalmers. *English Poets*, vol. X, p. 91, sq...). Cf. Herbert E. Cory. *The Critics of Edmund Spenser*. In *Modern Philology*, vol. II, p. 124 (1911).

of praise, he bore witness to his decay and had no difficulty in accounting for it. In the second dialogue of his *Complete Art of Poetry*, on *The Use and Necessity of Rules in Poetry*, he put in the mouth of Issachar, the meek husband of foppish Mrs. Lamode, an extravagant apology of modern poets as compared with the Ancients : « ... I vow I can't help thinking *Cowley* is finer than *Ovid* and the *Arthurs* as good as *Homer*, or *Virgil*. » But the wise Morisina reminded him that public opinion was not a safe criterion of literary merit :

... Poems have already lost their glory, and are become as great drugs as Quarles' and Withers', which for awhile carry'd the Acclamations along with them : nay, *Cowley* himself, so much ador'd for near Forty Years, loses every Day Ground with all those who love *Nature* and *Harmony*, which are Virtues not very common in that learned and witty Person ⁷².

In 1721 Gildon's neo-classicism proved still more incompatible with his old worship of Cowley, for he commented upon the Earl of Mulgrave's line :

True Wit is everlasting, like the sun,

... To take away these points, this flash of fancy, from my Lord Rochester, from great part of Cowley's verses, especially his *Mistress*, and even some of Waller's would be to render them very insipid, at least in those parts where this is all their merit.

He even protested against Dryden for « debasing Ovid to the level of Cowley, or some worse modern composer of Love-songs and amorous madrigals ». The *Odes* themselves did not, this time, escape censure. For, though he agreed with Cowley's conception of the Pindaric ode as lawless, « beyond the bounds of reason and judgment », he declared :

... I have never found my soul touch'd by the best of these performances (even from Cowley himself down to this day) tho' it has been scarce able to support the violent emotions, and excessive transports raised by the common translation ⁷³.

72. Cf. W. H. Durham. *Critical Essays of The Eighteenth Century*, 1700-1725 (p. 35-38).

73. *The Laws of Poetry, as laid down by the Duke of Buckinghamshire in his Essay on Poetry, by the Earl of Roscommon in his Essay on Translated Verse, and by the Lord Lansdowne on Unnatural Flights in poetry*, explained and illustrated. London, 1721 (p. 19, 119, 284...).

The *Davideis* also was discussed by Gildon who deplored, as a fault of which the Ancients would never have been guilty, the admixture of pastoral and lyric elements in an epic poem ⁷⁴, and by the *Spectator* where Cowley's division of his poem into twelve books merely because of Virgil's example was ridiculed as having « no foundation in reason » ⁷⁵. The author of another *Davideis*, Thomas Ellwood, indirectly criticized Cowley's epic, explaining in his preface, how he had « industriously abstained » from following the same lines as Cowley, because he wrote for « common readers », « in a stile familiar, and easie to be understood by such », therefore rejecting « the extravagant and almost boundless fancies; amazing and even dazeling flights, luxurious inventions; wild hyperboles, lofty language », and the supernatural machinery used by « the most celebrated poets » to embellish their works ⁷⁶.

From a technical point of view, Edward Bysshe examined Cowley's versification, sometimes favourably, but more often unfavourably. For instance, what Professor Saintsbury condemns as « apostrophation », was already denounced here, for, « no vowel can be cut off before another, when it cannot be sunk in the pronunciation of it », and examples of this fault were drawn from Cowley ⁷⁷. Nevertheless Bysshe quoted the poet's lines freely in his collection of thoughts and images. Thus was Cowley still considered as one of the foremost English poets, but by now his faults were as often pointed out as his merits. He was still something of an idol, but, at the same time, growing into a scarecrow.

This last use is best exemplified in the criticism of John Oldmixon. Oldmixon adapted to English poetry *La Manière de Bien Penser* of Father Bouhours, taking as his motto these lines from Mulgrave's *Essay on Poetry* :

All is darkness when the Fancy's bad,
So without judgment Fancy is but mad,

74. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

75. *Spectator*, N° 632 (December 3. 1714).

76. *Davideis. The life of David, King of Israel : a sacred poem in five books.* London, 1712 (p. xi, xii).

77. *The Art of English Poetry...* by Edward Bysshe... The 7th edition corrected and enlarged. London, 1725 (*Rules for making English Verse*, p. 7, 18, 21, 23, 24...).

an ominous choice for a critic of Cowley's verse. And indeed, Oldmixon, wanting to denounce « wrong thinking » in all its shapes, pitilessly pilloried his wit. The *Epistle Dedicatory* gave sure signs of this unsparing mood :

... How many great genius's have miscarry'd by not thinking rightly on subjects they were otherwise well able to handle and adorn... Thus it was that Dr. Donne, and Mr. Cowley, confounded Metaphysicks and Love, and turn'd wit into point.

Let us notice, however, that, while censuring Cowley, Oldmixon was far from despising him. For, as he let us know in the *Preface*, to be singled out by him — though only for rebuke — was a distinction which Cowley shared with Dryden, their eminence above the other English poets giving their very faults a priceless value as warnings to their successors. Oldmixon selected the two poets, not because he thought them bad, but for the very reverse, because they were the best he could find :

I have made use of none but the best, whether they wrote in verse or in prose, the faults of great men only being worth observation... for if such Authors as Tacitus and Seneca among the Ancients, Tasso, Malherbe, Balzac, Cowley and Dryden among the Moderns, fall into the grossest errors in thinking, what have not meaner genius's to fear from negligence, and a worse misfortune still, from ignorance ? ⁷⁸.

After a passing thrust at the mixture of Christian and pagan elements in heroic poems such as *Davideis* and *Paradise Lost* ⁷⁹, Oldmixon fastened upon *The Mistress*, taking up again the pleas of Walsh and Dryden for naturalness and sincerity in love-poems, and of Addison for true wit.

About forty years ago, Cowley's *Mistress* was cry'd up by half wits and half criticks, as the perfection of gallant poetry; and yet almost

78. *The Arts of Logick and Rhetorick, illustrated by examples taken out of the best Authors, Antient and Modern, in all the polite languages.* Interpreted and explain'd by that learned and judicious Critick, Father Bouhours, to which are added parallel quotations out of the most eminent English authors in verse and prose : Wherein the like observations are made on their beauties and blemishes, in all the various kinds of Thought and Expression. London, 1728 (*Epistle Dedicatory*, p. VIII, and *Preface*, p. XVIII).

79. Oldmixon did not favour the *Davideis* and sarcastically denounced Felton's immoderate praise of it (p. 309).

all the thoughts in those love-verses are false, because they are unnatural, full of affectation and point, and aiming rather to shew the Author's wit, and even learning, than his tenderness and passion, by which only he could reach and move his mistress's heart ⁸⁰.

Cowley's technical skill was next summarily dismissed and, in the same breath, his talent as a prose-writer recognized — a most important passage, since it shows that as early as 1728 Oldmixon reached, and definitely expressed, the judgment ultimately passed on Cowley, after many doubts and misgivings, by the late eighteenth century :

... I take no notice of the numbers here, because I do not remember that I ever heard Mr. Cowley commended for his versification; and for a man who wrote prose as well as any one, and had as much wit, to waste so much of it in prosaick poetry, is a matter of lamentation to all that know his merit and respect his memory, which all lovers of good sense and good learning must do ⁸¹.

Later in the book Oldmixon placed him on a level with Pascal ⁸².

The critic again and again insisted upon the lack of balance and discretion of Cowley's wit :

... He offends to enormity by saying more than he needed, and spoils what was well imagin'd and well said, by turning it and winding it, and putting it in too many lights, which is well-known to every one that knows Cowley.

He even found Addison's attack on mixt wit too indulgent :

... Of Cowley, he says : he was an admirable poet, had as much true wit as any author that ever writ, and indeed, all other talents of an extraordinary genius; which was Cowley's characteristick sixty or seventy years ago, before numbers and versification were so well understood as now they are.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 36. He had also stressed Cowley's wrong use of his intellectual powers (in the *Epistle Dedicatory*) : « ... Cowley..., with as much wit as ever man had, shows as little judgment [as Donne], by which his poetry is in our days so sunk in the opinion of good judges that there is no hope of its rising again... »

81. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 127 : on occasion of the essay *Of Myself*. Oldmixon was not insensible to the charm of Cowley's verse. For he confessed his delight (p. 285) in the fourth stanza of *The Praise of Pindar*. Let us note, by the way, that he fancied these lines to have been written by Cowley « in his garden at Chertsey in Surrey » — a pretty but impossible notion, since the ode was printed in 1656, and Cowley did not dwell at Chertsey till 1665.

Thus Cowley was stripped, not only of the right to be esteemed « a good writer » according to the neo-classical dogma, but even of his title of « a good poet », which neither Dryden nor Addison had denied him.

The source of all these faults lay, to Oldmixon's mind, in the unfortunate fact that Cowley chose to follow Donne :

... It seems strange to me that after Suckling and Waller had written, whose genius's were so fine and just, Mr. Cowley should imitate Mr. Donne; in whom there's hardly anything that's agreeable, or one stroke which has any likeness to Nature...

And besides, Cowley, because of his very talent, seemed to him a most unsafe model for young poets :

... I am the longer upon this because it is very dangerous to recommend authors who abound in false wit, tho' they may also abound in true, as Cowley does...

Oldmixon, however, did not censure Cowley without experiencing that pang of remorse and confusion which his predecessors had shown, and every now and again he reminded the reader of his true admiration for his victim. He was quite willing to pay him homage, and glad to praise his talent as a prose-writer. But he remained faithful to his duty of denouncing « wrong-thinking » whenever he found it, and could not spare Cowley :

... I expect to be censur'd by many lovers of poetry for being so free with the character of the great Cowley, who, as a wit, deserves that title; but as a poet he seems to have lost almost all his merit in our time⁸³.

Such a comprehensive criticism, though coming from a minor writer, carries a deep meaning. Men like Oldmixon, austere observant of the rules — and they were every day becoming more numerous — gave up all esteem of Cowley as a metaphysical poet and as an artist. The gorgeous display of conceits which had delighted the preceding generations shocked their sense of self-restraint. The variety of measures and rhythm hurt their love of smooth regularity. In their eyes, he lacked both judgment and

83. *The Arts of Logick and Rhetorick*..., p. 225, 291, 294, 296, 331, 309... Cf. also, p. 226, 285, etc...

taste. And yet, they could not help looking up to him as a wit. Even by the sternest neo-classicists the fascination was still felt. They remained faithful to the old admiration of the poet's intellect, extravagant though its expression might be.

An all-important change was however being effected in the fortunes of Cowley, for while the preceding era, which, to use one of Cowley's images, may be termed that of « classicism militant », had scarcely attempted any actual discrimination among his works, and was to a great extent convinced, in Samuel Wesley's phrase, that « whate'er Cowley writes must please », the age of « classicism triumphant », made a choice among these writings. From the stage of unmixed admiration, Cowley, had now definitely passed into that of discrimination and selection.

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As might be expected, *The Mistress* fared badly. Addison, Gildon, Oldmixon focussed their criticisms on it, for they found in it the main characteristics of his metaphysical — or « gothic » — style. The *Davideis* was revered, and writers like Dunton, Felton, and Jacob, admired it unreservedly. But partial criticisms were brought forward by the *Spectator*, Dennis, Gildon, Oldmixon, and we feel that most readers followed Mulgrave's example, and simply left it out of the list of heroic poems worth reading.

Apart from *The Mistress*, the aspect of Cowley's works which most attracted censure was his versification. None could praise it, and even Felton must acknowledge there was a general lack of art in his poetry. Walter Harte declared : « he is no master of versification », and a contributor to *Applebee's Journal* stated that « Waller will be read, admir'd and understood, when Mr. Cowley's best performances will scarce be preserved from oblivion, because of his excellent smoothness »⁸⁴. Waller was now considered the better poet of the two.

The *Pindaric odes* formed the stronghold of Cowley's poetical fame. Congreve and Addison did not mean to undermine them,

⁸⁴. Cf. Spence, *Anecdotes...*, p. 339, and *Applebee's Journal* for June 1732 (printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. II, p. 786).

Oldmixon spared them, and they continued to enjoy abundance of imitators ⁸⁵.

Their popularity received a striking illustration in the book of a French critic, the abbé Yart. Desirous of giving his countrymen some idea of English poetry, Yart translated and commented upon the English poems he thought worth knowing. In his second volume, he devoted over fifty pages to Cowley, and he selected as most representative of the lyrical genius of the poet three odes, two of which were avowedly Pindarics (the ode upon Charles the Second's Restoration, and upon Liberty), the other, though metrically regular, carrying all the features of a true Pindaric, and described by Cowley himself as « a rapture » (this is the invective against Cromwell, in the *Discourse*) ⁸⁶. What Yart admired in these odes was Cowley's wit, the unexpected flashes of the thought, and the luxuriant wealth of its illustration :

Peu de poètes ont eu autant d'esprit, autant de singularité et de fécondité dans l'esprit que Cowley; notre Théophile, qui lui ressemble un peu, est beaucoup au-dessous de lui ⁸⁷.

He did not entirely approve of them, and took liberties with the text, suppressing or toning down Cowley's ingenuities to make them acceptable to his French readers. He acutely observed the central defect of Cowley's wit, and declared, after Dryden and Addison :

Le défaut du poète est de pousser trop loin la même idée; il ne saurait finir...

But he realized that this very redundancy of wit, was the source of many beauties :

85. The contributor of *Applebee's Journal* thought that Cowley's odes « manifest an energy of thought and a brightness of fancy, which make him the Pindar of the English tongue ».

86. Waller's edition, II, p. 351.

87. *Idée de la Poésie Angloise*, ou traduction des meilleurs poètes anglois, qui n'ont point encore paru dans notre langue, avec un jugement sur leurs ouvrages, et une comparaison de leurs poésies avec celles des auteurs anciens et modernes. Par M. l'Abbé Yart... Paris, 1749 (II, p. 271). Another French writer, Yves Trochereau, issued in the same year a « *Choix de différents Morceaux de poésie traduits de l'Anglais* ». He did not include any poem of Cowley's, and barely mentioned him in his notes to Mulgrave's *Essay on Poetry* (p. 21). His selection was made according to the strict classical dogma.

Nous avons tous les germes de ces idées, mais il n'appartenait qu'à Cowley de pousser celle-ci aussi loin; il s'égare quelquefois; mais en s'égayant, il nous découvre des terres qui nous étaient inconnues⁸⁸.

These remarks are characteristic of the neo-classical appreciation of Cowley's lyrical talent : a rather perplexed one. Yart, like the English critics we have mentioned, seemed at once attracted and repelled by it. And, like them, he failed to bring it within compass of the rules. He condemned its lawlessness, and in the same breath admired its fertility. Cowley possessed, whether owing to external causes or to his own mental constitution, those merits and those faults which caused him to be regarded by critics, as one of them very justly said, « with a mixture of indulgence and wonder », much like a spoilt child of genius. The phrase comes nearest to an exact description of the attitude which the early eighteenth century adopted towards Cowley as a lyric poet.

The time was not far off, however, when the tyranny of the odes would be shaken off, and Pindar's poetry revealed in its true light. For in 1749 Gilbert West published his translation of the Odes, and in his preface, analysing their essence, was faced with the task of contradicting almost all Cowley had said and done. With due respect, but firmly, he achieved his aim. Of « certain writings known by the name of Pindarick Odes », he said :

... I must insist that very few, which I remember to have read under that title, not excepting even those written by the admired Mr. Cowley, whose Wit and Fire first brought them into reputation, have the least resemblance to the manner of the author, whom they pretend to imitate...

... I cannot help observing that he [Pindar] is so entirely free from anything like the far-fetched thoughts, the witty extravagances, and puerile conceits of Mr. Cowley and the rest of his imitators, that I cannot recollect so much as even a single antithesis in all his odes⁸⁹.

In fact, as early as 1712, Steele had expressed a doubt as to

88. *Ibid.*, p. 264, 289... This last remark arose from one of Cowley's surprising discoveries, in the *Ode upon His Majesties Restoration and Return* (st. 12).

89. *Odes of Pindar, with several other pieces in prose and verse*... To which is prefixed a Dissertation on the Olympick games. By Gilbert West, Esq. London, 1749.

As early as 1728 Young had advanced the same theory, but without mentioning Cowley, in the *Discourse on Ode* appended to his ode : *Ocean*.

Cowley's pindaric abilities. In the course of a fanciful description of Parnassus he supposed a meeting of Cowley and Pindar :

I saw Pindar walking all alone, no one daring to accost him till Cowley joyn'd himself to him; but growing weary of one who almost walk'd him out of breath, he left him for Horace and Anacreon, with whom he seem'd infinitely delighted ⁹⁰.

This acute little piece of criticism aptly defines the selection which Cowley's readers were beginning to make among his works: the easy grace of his familiar poetry and prose appealing to them more than the strained sublimity of his more ambitious efforts.

The *Anacreontics* were as yet little quoted, and seemingly little relished, but the *Essays* abruptly sprang out of the darkness in which they lay, into the bright light of popularity. And if they did not enjoy, in these early days of their triumphant career, the fame which eventually awaited them, they were at any rate safely launched into the world by the apt praises of the younger masters of the essay, the *Spectator* writers. This was the main, the essential change in Cowley's fortunes at this stage. If he almost ceased to exist as a poet, if his « metaphysical » poetry was discarded as unnatural and his poetic skill denied, since he lacked smoothness, his prose, being simply and naturally written, and laden with sweet wisdom, rose high in the estimation of neo-classical readers.

III

As Dryden eminently represented his generation in their opinion of Cowley, so Pope may fairly claim to hold the same office as regards his own time. Cowley was, with Waller and Dryden, one of his early masters, and the judgments Pope pronounced on his works cover a ground of over thirty years.

No poet then living was a more faithful disciple of Cowley than Pope, if we judge from the numerous borrowings scattered through his verse. We learn from Spence that, still a boy, fired with holy enthusiasm, he boldly attempted to unite in a heroic

90. *Spectator*, N° 514 (October 20. 1812).

poem on Alcander all that was best in the style of the best epic poets :

... I endeavoured (said he, smiling), in this poem, to collect all the beauties of the great epic writers into one piece : there was Milton's style in one part, and Cowley's in another; here the style of Spenser imitated, and there of Statius ⁹¹.

He rivalled Cowley in poetical precocity, and one of his first attempts was to vie with him on the same ground, since there appeared in a collection : *Poems on Several Occasions*, 1717, announced by the editor as written « by a youth of thirteen » ⁹², eleven poems which may safely be ascribed to him. And these consist, besides two original pieces, in four imitations of Waller, two of Cowley, and three paraphrases after the manner of Cowley. The *Verses written in imitation of Cowley* are two short poems, the former : *Presenting a Lark*, obviously inspired by *The Mistress*, the latter : *The River*, copying to some extent the *Odes* ⁹³. Later, in his *Imitations of the English Poets*, two more poems were devoted to Cowley : *The Garden*, and *Weeping*. And Cowley's influence is everywhere discernible in his versification, especially in his liking for the epigrammatic couplet.

Moreover, practically all his writings contain reminiscences of the elder poet, a line here, an image there being derived from his poems. Bowles rightly thought his *Pastorals* bore the stamp of Cowley, for besides two precise borrowings, the general tone was undoubtedly designed to emulate Cowley's manner ⁹⁴. One couplet

91. Joseph Spence. *Anecdotes...*, p. 277.

92. Cf. the text of these poems, and a discussion on their authorship in *The London Mercury*, August. 1924 (vol. X, p. 614, sq...) : A. E. Case. *Some new Poems by Pope* ?

93. The translations, « paraphrased in the manner of Cowley », were, the first two from Catullus, and the third from Cornelius Gallus.

The River is distinctly imitative of the *Pindaric odes*. Here is a remembrance from *The Ecstasy* :

A second Sun thou dost present,
And bring new heav'ns before our eyes;
We view a milder firmament,
And pleas'd, look downward to the Skies (st. 4).

94. *Spring*, l. 81, 2 :

Sylvia's like Autumn ripe, yet mild as May,
More bright than noon, yet fresh as early day...

Dav. III, l. 553, 4 :

in *Windsor Forest* reminds us of the poem on Somerset House. Cowley had said :

And here, Behold, in a long bending row,
How two joynt Cities make one glorious Bow,

Pope adapted :

I see, I see, where two fair cities bend
Their ample bow, a new Whitehall ascend ⁹⁵.

In the *Essay of Criticism* we hear at least four distinct echoes of Cowley ⁹⁶. *The Temple of Fame* twice recalls *The Complaint* ⁹⁷. *The Rape of the Lock* perhaps owes a conceit to one of Cowley's paraphrases of Horace ⁹⁸. *The Essay on Man* itself, though written much later, still bears traces of the influence of Cowley ⁹⁹, the *Epistles* and the *Satires* are not free from it ¹⁰⁰. These borrowings come from all parts of Cowley's works — yet, a significant fact, less from his *Mistress*, than from his *Odes*, his *Miscellanies*, and his paraphrases — ¹⁰¹. They point to an indisputable familiarity and a deep sympathy. Pope knew Cowley well, and enjoyed his company.

Hot as ripe Noon, sweet as the blooming Day,
Like *July* furious, but more fair than *May*...

Cf. also *Winter*, l. 41 and Cowley : *Eccho* (I, p. 107).

95. *On the Queens repairing Somerset House*, l. 47-8 (I, p. 433), and : *Windsor Forest*, l. 379, 380.

96. Cf. *Criticism*, l. 189, and *On the death of Mr. Crashaw*, l. 58 (I, p. 49). — *Crit.*, l. 193-4, and *Dav.* II, l. 833-4. — *Crit.* l. 295, and *Of Wit*, st. 5 (I, p. 17). — *Crit.* l. 396-7, and *To Sir William Davenant*, l. 26-27 (I, p. 43). — *Crit.* l. 444-5, and *Life and Fame*, l. 4 (I, p. 201).

97. *Temple of Fame*, l. 10-11, and *Complaint*, l. 1 (I, p. 435). — *Temple*, l. 505-6, and *Complaint*, st. 8 (I, p. 440).

98. *The Rape of the Lock*, V, l. 75... and *The Monopoly*, st. 3 (I, p. 121). — *Rape*, V, l. 150, and *Horace*, IV, 2.

99. *Essay*, II, l. 3, and *Life and Fame*, st. 1, l. 10 (I, p. 202). — *Essay*, III, l. 46, and *The Plagues of Egypt*, st. 1 (I, p. 202). — *Essay*, III, l. 306, and *On the death of Mr. Crashaw*, l. 54, 5 (I, p. 49). — *Essay*, IV, l. 206, and *Horace*, Ep. I, l. 10. — *Essay*, IV, l. 283, and *A Translation out of Virgil*, l. 52 (II, p. 410).

100. *Epistle*, I, l. 143 (*To Sir Richard Temple*), and *A Translation out of Virgil*, l. 47 (II, p. 410). — *Epilogue to the Satires*, *Dialogue II*, l. 82-3, and *To the Bishop of Lincoln*, l. 46-7 (I, p. 30). — *To Mr. Jervas* (III, p. 207), and *On the death of Mr. William Hervey*, st. 8 (I, p. 34).

101. His private letters also contained a few passing allusions to Cowley. In a letter to Henry Cromwell, October 19. 1709 (Courthope edition, VI, p. 86); in a letter to Steele, June 4, 1712 (Courthope, VI, p. 391); in a « Letter to a noble Lord »... (*Ibid.*, V, p. 436).

He naturally expressed his opinion of him at various times. And, though his allusions to him are brief, they are fraught with significance, and carry much more interest than their extent would seem to deserve. He began, in *Windsor Forest*, with enthusiastic praise :

Here his first lays majestick Denham sung;
 Here the last numbers flow'd from Cowley's tongue.
 O early lost ! What tears the river shed,
 When the sad pomp along his bank was led !...
 Since Fate relentless stopp'd their heavenly voice,
 No more the forests ring, or groves rejoice;
 Who now shall charm the shades, where Cowley strung
 His living harp, and lofty Denham sung... ? ¹⁰².

This youthful and uncritical tribute, simply expressive of affectionate admiration, received much qualification a few years later. As early as 1706 he had written to Walsh : « Conceit is to nature what paint is to beauty; it is not only needless, but impairs what it would improve » ¹⁰³. Then in his *Essay on Criticism* :

Some to conceit alone their taste confine,
 And glittering thoughts struck out at ev'ry line;
 Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;
 One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit.
 Poets, like painters, thus unskilled to trace
 The naked Nature, and the living grace,
 With gold and jewels cover every part,
 And hide with ornaments their want of art ¹⁰⁴.

We find here judgments of the type which Dryden and Congreve had used, and Addison was just meditating. These lines are generally construed as applying to Cowley. It must be remembered that his name was not mentioned; yet the description fits in so well with the characteristics of his verse, that we must admit he was at any rate criticised by implication, even though Pope might have primarily borne his followers in mind. Pope himself, however, stated to Spence his conviction, towards 1734, that Cowley was « a fine poet in spite of all his faults » ¹⁰⁵.

102. *Windsor Forest*, l. 271, sq... (Courthope edition, I, p. 356).

103. *Works*, VI, p. 51.

104. *Essay on Criticism*, l. 289, sq... (*Ibid.*, II, p. 50).

105. J. Spence. *Anecdotes...*, p. 173.

Cowley always remained very dear to him. When he next mentioned him, it was to deplore his neglect, and, most important, to define what he accepted in his works, and what he rejected :

Who now reads Cowley ? if he pleases yet,
His moral pleases, not his pointed wit;
Forgot his epic, nay Pindaric art,
But still I love the language of his heart.

A note to these lines further established a hierarchy among the « forgotten » parts. To him, his « pindaric art » « has much more merit than his epic, but is very unlike the character as well as numbers of Pindar » ¹⁰⁶.

Thus, Pope seemed to have gone further than his contemporaries and thrown off the spell which held them captive : Cowley's wit was no longer sacred to him. But he loved « his moral », « the language of his heart », and he repeated this statement in a slightly altered form :

Though daring Milton sits sublime,
In Spenser native Muses play;
Nor yet shall Waller yield to time,
Nor pensive Cowley's moral lay ¹⁰⁷.

What he meant by these « lays » may easily be guessed. It could be nothing but the *Essays* and the poems which accompanied them. There resided the whole of Cowley's wisdom, his moral doctrine, the sincere expression of his inmost thoughts.

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Pope's declared preference embodied the general choice of the age. It confirmed the overthrow of Cowley as one of the best English poets, and his setting up as one of the best prose-writers. All that was excessive in Cowley's verse, his imaginative outbursts, the boldness of his phrase and rhythms, was subdued by the age of reason and restraint. The prose, on the other hand,

¹⁰⁶. *Imitations of Horace : Epistle to Augustus*, l. 75 sq... (*Works*, III, p. 352).

¹⁰⁷. *Part of the ninth Ode of the fourth Book of Horace* (Courthope ed., III, p. 419).

stood out, especially the *Essays*, in which he so charmingly expressed his natural tastes.

Yet Pope went one step further than his contemporaries, and, towards 1740, he held somewhat the same position as Dryden had occupied in 1700. The same superior insight caused him to anticipate his age, when he condemned his « pointed wit » and also when he asked : « who now reads Cowley » ? For we have met on our way many sure proofs that Cowley still kept his hold upon a fairly large portion of the public, and even upon many critics. By the middle of the century, he was still alive as a poet and as a wit. Had not Pope himself been compelled to admit that :

In all debates where critics bear a part,
Not one but nods, and talks of Johnson's art,
Of Shakespeare's Nature, and of Cowley's Wit ? ¹⁰⁸.

Besides, he introduced in his appreciations new elements of which his age was scarcely conscious. When he praised « the pensive Cowley's moral lay », or « the language of his heart », he adopted a sentimental view which it is strange to find discovered and relished by the brightest exponent of neo-classical orthodoxy. Through this preference for a « pensive » and « tender » Cowley, he seemed to seek an outlet for his own emotional needs. While rejecting the romantic flights in Cowley's verse, he descried with delight romantic elements in his thought. May we not detect here a trace of the undercurrent of romanticism which ran through all the neo-classical age, even in its moment of triumph, even in its most triumphant leader ? As far back as 1740, the neo-classicists themselves seemed to be preparing for the appreciation of Cowley by the Romantics.

¹⁰⁸. *Imitations of Horace : Epistle to Augustus*, l. 81, sq... (*Works*, III, p. 352).

CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF JOHNSON

The heading of this chapter, arising, like the preceding ones, less from choice than from facts, is in itself the symbol of a significant change in the fortunes of Cowley's reputation. Since his death, his most representative critics had been Dryden and Pope, each in his turn the ruling poet of England. Now, the man we find undoubtedly entitled to represent the critical body of opinion of his time concerning Cowley, is Dr. Samuel Johnson, a professional critic.

For many years Cowley had inspired poets. He had, in a way, continued to create through their creations, his works were still alive and exerted an active influence on English letters. Now we shall find him become a prey to critics, passively suffering a species of post-mortem examination. Ever since Dryden's day, this change was being prepared and predicted. But it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that critics decidedly gained the upper hand over poets and disinterested readers. This does not mean he was no longer imitated or enjoyed. He was much more than a name of the past to all cultivated persons, and the reprints of his works, whether separate or included in collections, show that he still held an important place in literary life. Even among the public, however, save for a few enthusiasts, the mood in which he was approached grew altered, and resembled much more that of the critics proper.

I

The great event in the history of Cowley's editions during that

period was the publication in 1772, by the Rev. Richard Hurd, of two volumes containing the *Select Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley*. The fact is interesting in more than one respect. First, it proves that the complete works of Cowley had no longer any hopes of finding enough readers to justify a reprint. Most libraries possessed, no doubt, copies of the numberless folios Herringman had sold in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, or of the three volume editions later produced by Jacob Tonson. But readers would certainly have refrained from buying them, had they been issued again. In fact, if we may believe Wordsworth, many were getting rid of them since, by 1790, « the booksellers' stalls in London swarmed with the folios of Cowley »¹.

On the other hand, the success of Hurd's selection furnished evidence as to the interest these readers would still take in Cowley, if presented in a form that suited their taste. For the book was eagerly bought (four editions running out in a few years), and eagerly discussed. Its reviving influence was strikingly emphasized in a statement of H. Headley's, in 1787 :

... As the unnatural relish for tinsel and metaphysical conceit declined, his bays gradually lost their verdure; he was no longer to be found in the hands of the multitude, and untouched even in the closets of the curious; in short, the shades of oblivion gathered fast round him. In consequence however, of many detached parts of him which teem with the finest pictures of the heart, Bishop Hurd undertook his well-known edition in which the most exceptionable Poetry (that had operated like a mill-stone and sunk the rest) is omitted, and the generality of his charms preserved; he has now a dozen readers where before he had scarce one...².

Apart from this edition, no work of Cowley was issued separately — except for a reprint of the Books of Plants, in 1795, which allows us to suppose that poetical men of science appreciated Cowley's medical learning in its mythological setting —. But, as in former times, publishers missed no opportunity to include his

1. *Essay, supplementary to the Preface (Poems)*. By William Wordsworth : including *Lyrical Ballads*, and the *Miscellaneous pieces* of the Author. With additional poems, a new preface, and a supplementary essay. London, 1815, p. 354).

2. *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry*. With remarks by Henry Headley. London, 1787. Preface, p. x.

name whenever possible. William Hay, the translator of Martial, printed in his appendix nine epigrams paraphrased by Cowley « as a desert to a coarse entertainment »³. John Nichols unearthed three « academical » productions Cowley had written when at Cambridge⁴. Ritson quoted, in his *Select Collection of English Songs*, *The Chronicle* and the *Anacreontics*⁵, and, in his *English Anthology*, three more poems⁶. Even a short note addressed by Cowley to Dr. Busby, probably on occasion of his sending him the *Plantarum Libri Duo*, was thought worth publishing in *The Gentleman's Magazine*⁷. And when an anonymous successor of Edward Bysshe undertook to display the *Beauties of English Poetry*, he borrowed about a dozen passages from him⁸.

Cowley also figured in the numerous collections of English poets or prose-writers which this enterprising age gathered so actively. When the Rev. John Wesley set up his *Christian Library*, he published the essays *Of Solitude*, *Of Greatness*, *The Dangers of an Honest man in much Company*, *The Shortness of Life and Uncertainty of Riches*, *The Danger of Procrastination*, and the *Epitaphium vivi Auctoris*. And this choice is significant of the interest Cowley's prose-works awoke in a certain class of readers. Wesley was seeking after moral advice for his flock, and literary merit weighed little with him, since he did not include the justly famous *Of Myself*. A personal meditation could not be used as a guide through life, and he was careful to choose those essays which contained the richest instructive matter. Thus understood, Cowley was entitled to a place in the *Christian Library*.

As to his poetry, Hurd's choice was reproduced in *The British*

3. *Select Epigrams of Martial*. Translated and imitated by William Hay, with an appendix of some by Cowley and other hands. London, 1755.

4. *A Select Collection of Poems*: With notes, biographical and historical. London, 1781 (vol. VII, p. 70...). These were the contributions of Cowley to the Cambridge collections of 1637 and 1640.

5. *A Select Collection of English Songs*. Collected by Joseph Ritson. London, 1783 (vol. I, p. 140; II, p. 24, 164).

6. *The English Anthology*. London, 1793. The poems selected are: *The Waiting-Maid*, *The Epicure*, *Claudian's old man of Verona*, and a « prayer ».

7. *The Gentleman's Magazine*. October, 1787 (vol. LVII, p. 847).

8. *The Beauties of Poetry displayed*. Containing Observations on the different species of Poetry, and the rules of English Versification. Exemplified by a large collection of beautiful passages, similes, and descriptions. London, 1757.

Poets, published at Edinburgh in 1773, the interesting point being the total exclusion of poems from *The Mistress* or any part of the *Davideis*⁹. In Robert Bell's edition of *The Poets of Great Britain*, his works filled four volumes¹⁰, and two in Samuel Johnson's *Works of the English Poets*¹¹. Robert Anderson again published his *Poetical Works* in 1792¹², and in the *Specimens of the Early English Poets*, selected by George Ellis, extracts from *The Mistress*, and the whole of *The Chronicle* appeared¹³.

But in all these collections, instead of standing out by himself, he was only one among many, lost in the crowd of the « old poets ». And surely he was rather thought of now as « old Cowley », than as « immortal », « incomparable Mr. Cowley ».



Many people, however, thought him worth reading, and a long list of allusions might be collected, proving that he remained, to some at least, one of the major English poets. The *Adventurer* for March 1753, recalling the praises given to sleep by the poets, quoted the description of the poppy in his books of *Plants*, and alluded to the love of solitude revealed by his *Essays*¹⁴.

Boileau and Pope were made to discuss, in one of Lord Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead*, the respective merits of English poets, and, after dealing with Waller, Pope repeated of Cowley, through Lyttelton's prose, what he had said better in verse :

...We had also in England another poet of the same age, extremely admired by all his contemporaries, in whose works there is still a

9. *The British Poets*. Edinburgh, 1773 (vol. VII). They included practically the whole of the *Miscellanies*, four Pindaric odes, five poems from the 1663 volume.

10. *The Poets of Great Britain*. Complete. From Chaucer to Churchill. London, 1777. The contents were those of Sprat's 1668 volume, save that the order was changed.

11. *The Works of the English Poets*. With prefaces, biographical and critical, by Samuel Johnson. London, 1779 (vols. I, II. In the 1790 edition, vols. VII, VIII, IX).

12. *A complete edition of the Poets of Great-Britain*. By Robert Anderson. London, 1792 (vol. V).

13. *Specimens of the Early English Poets...* by George Ellis, Esq. London, 1790 (In the 1811 edition, vol. III).

14. *The Adventurer*. March 20, 1753, N° 39, p. 233.

greater redundancy of imagination, more affectation of wit, a worse taste, and less judgment : but he touched the heart more, and had much finer feelings. I mean Mr. Cowley...

To which Boileau replied, suspiciously echoing Dryden's words :

... He seems to me a great wit, and a very good man, but not a good poet. Of late I hear he is sunk very much in the opinion of the English...

... Yet I cannot but think, he continued, voicing no doubt, this time, Lyttelton's own opinion, that if some of the superfluities of his wit were given by Apollo to some of their modern bards, who write commonplace morals in very smooth verse, without any absurdity, but without one new thought, or one lively spark of imagination, it would be a great favour to them, and do them more good than all the rules in my art of Poetry, and yours of Criticism...¹⁵.

Cowley was still appreciated by John Hall Stevenson :

If Shakespeare every Muse inspire,
Sole sovereign of the tuneful throng,
Praise is still due to Cowley's lyre,
And Gray's sweet melancholy song¹⁶.

Crabbe's father heard John Wesley reciting in one of his sermons, « though with an application of his own », the *Anacreontic Age*¹⁷.

In the course of his *Anecdotes*, John Nichols alluded to the poem which closes *The Garden*, quoted a passage from the *Discourse concerning Cromwell*, and these lines, written by « the Rev. William Clarke, which express once more the views of religious-minded persons :

Here's rare surly Ben...
Here's Milton can boast
His Paradise Lost;
And Cowley his virtue and wit¹⁸.

15. Lord Lyttelton. *Dialogues of the Dead*. London, 1760, p. 130...

16. In imitation of Horace, Book IV, ode IX : To Lollius (*The Works of John Hall Stevenson, Esq.* London, 1795, vol. II, p. 14).

17. *The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Crabbe*. With his Letters and Journals, and his Life, by his son. London, 1834 (I, p. 148).

18. *Literary Anecdotes of the eighteenth century...* London, 1812 (vol. II, p. 260; IV, p. 106; IV, p. 376). The last quotation is part of *An Impromptu on some of the English Poets*.

Dodsley never failed to include in his *Annual Register* passages referring to Cowley, now Goldsmith's judgment on his prose, now part of the essay *Of Greatness*, quoted by James Granger in his *Biographical History of England*, or Gray's lines on Cowley in *The Progress of Poesy*, or again Johnson's opinion of the meta-physical poets. In 1759 he had mentioned Clarendon's praise of the poet, and so did *The Critical Review* ¹⁹.

His defining of Seneca as « short-lung'd » (cf. ode *Of Wit*) was severely rebuked as guilty of nothing less than « three capital errors », though the author expressed his « affection » for Cowley as a man, and his « admiration » for his wit ²⁰.

A contributor of *The Scot's Magazine*, reviewing « the remarkable circumstances that occasioned the death of four English poets », followed Spence and Warton's accounts of Cowley's accident; and *The Gentleman's Magazine* gave information about Chertsey, much after the manner of *Notes and Queries* ²¹.

Cowley's importance was therefore acknowledged in various quarters. Yet the interest which was taken in him now differed from that of the past. No one felt any more the rapturous enthusiasm of former times. Enthusiasm there still was, but of a more sober type. Practically everybody knew of him, many readers found something to enjoy in his verse or in his prose, but they no longer looked up to him, and affectionate indulgence took the place of wondering worship.

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The attitude which the poets of the age adopted towards Cowley bears out the truth of this assertion. They loved, admired, or copied him in parts, with the comfortable feeling of superiority

19. Dodsley's *Annual Register*: vol. XI, p. 164 (1768); vol. XII, p. 140 (1769); vol. XV, p. 228 (1772); vol. XXII, p. 27 (1779); vol. II, p. 310. And *Critical Review*, vol. VII, p. 540 [cf. also, vol. VII, p. 104; vol. XXXIV, p. 451; vol. XLVII, p. 445, etc...].

20. *Joineriana*: or, *The Book of Scraps...* By Samuel Patterson. London, 1772 (I, p. 61-65).

21. *The Scot's Magazine*, 1782 (vol. XLIV, p. 595). — *The Gentleman's Magazine* for March 1797 (vol. LXVII, p. 199). The account was William Stukeley's.

their adherence to the classical dogma gave them over one who was still, according to that dogma, something of a barbarian.

Robert Lloyd echoed this mood when, in an ode « spoken on a public occasion at Westminster School », he recalled the illustrious men of the school, first Dryden, then Cowley, and, though indulgent to his wit, set his morals, as exhibited in the *Essays*, far above « the poet's trifles » :

Nor, Cowley, be thy Muse forgot ! which strays
In wit's ambiguous flowery maze,
With many a pointed turn and studied art :
Tho' affectation blot thy rhyme,
Thy mind was lofty and sublime,
And manly honour dignified thy heart :
Though fond of wit, yet firm to virtue's plan,
The poet's trifles ne'er disgrac'd the man.

.....
Well might thy morals sweet engage
Th'attention of the mitred Sage,
Mixt with the plain simplicity of truth... 22.

Cowper professed his youthful love for Cowley, his regret that such « splendid wit » should have been spoilt by the vicious taste of his age, and also his respect for the retired philosopher of Chertsey :

Thee too, enamour'd of the life I lov'd,
Pathetic in its praise, in its pursuit
Determined, and possessing it at last
With transports such as favour'd lovers feel,
I studied, prized, and wish'd that I had known,
Ingenious Cowley ! And though now reclaim'd
By modern lights from an erroneous taste,
I cannot but lament thy splendid wit
Entangled in the cobwebs of the schools,
I still revere thee, courtly though retired;
Though stretch'd at ease in Chertsey's silent bowers,
Not unemploy'd; and finding rich amends
For a lost world in solitude and verse... 23.

The most marked development in Cowley's influence over poets,

22. *The Poetical Works of Robert Lloyd*... London, 1774 (I, p. 152).

23. *The Task*, IV, l. 718-730. (*The Works of William Cowper*, Aldine ed. VI, p. 96).

at this stage, is no doubt the decline of his Pindaric odes. They still found imitators among the more obscure poets : such names as Smart, Langhorne, Shaw, Lovibond, Penrose, Whitehead and Blacklock, might be mentioned ²⁴; and in 1754 an ode « inscribed to Secretary Belchier » openly claimed Cowley's patronage ²⁵.

The greater poets, however, drew back from its « lawlessness », and sought for simpler measures, or — partly owing, perhaps, to Gilbert West's preface and translation —, attempted to emulate the regular stanzaic scheme of Pindar's *Odes*. The poet of this period who owed most to Cowley, Thomas Gray, expressly repudiated the Cowleyan conception of the ode. Though, as he wrote to Thomas Warton in 1754, he did not approve of the division into strophes, antistrophes, and epodes, he advised the use of stanzas not above nine lines long. And, according to Mason, he abhorred

that chain of irregular stanzas which Cowley introduced, and falsely called Pindaricks; and which, from the extreme facility of execution, produced a number of miserable imitators ²⁶.

That this judgment expressed Gray's true opinion, may be seen from this note to *The Progress of Poesy* :

... We have had in our language no other odes of the sublime kind than that of Dryden on St. Cecilia's Day; for Cowley, who had his merit, yet wanted judgment, style, and harmony for such a task... ²⁷.

Yet Gray possessed an intimate knowledge of Cowley's works, and more than once echoed their words and rhythms; in the ode *On Spring*, in the *Elegy written in a country Churchyard*, in *The Progress of Poesy*, in *The Bard*, frequent reminiscences may be detected, from the *Miscellanies*, *The Mistress*, the *Odes*, the *Davideis* ²⁸. It is, however, worth notice, that, when he review-

24. Cf. Schipper, *Englische Metrik*. II, p. 813.

25. *The Villa, or Glasnevin, A Poem. Written in imitation of Cowley's Pindariques*. Dublin, 1754.

26. *The Works of Thomas Gray*, in prose and verse. Edited by Edmund Gosse. London, 1884 (II, p. 262).

27. *The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray*. London, 1883 (The Aldine ed., p. 111).

28. The indebtedness of Gray to Cowley has been studied in a series of four articles in *Notes and Queries*, by R. T. The first two bringing out resemblances between Cowley's and Gray's English poems (I, IV, p. 204, 252); the

wed the English poets, in his ode *The Progress of Poesy*, he only praised Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden. To him Cowley might be known, and freely borrowed from, but he was no longer a model one could follow, nor could he now be ranked among the great poets of England.

His prose writings were meanwhile gaining ground, and Goldsmith expressed his sense of their growing fortunes more clearly than had ever been done before : « The time seems to be at hand, when justice will be done to Mr. Cowley's prose, as well as poetical writings... »²⁹.

II

The rather perplexed attitude of readers and of poets towards Cowley's verse, found a clearer expression in the critics' estimates. They could neither approve of everything, nor disapprove of everything. Obligated to make a choice, they were met with the difficult task of sifting the grain from the chaff, in a work where they seemed inextricably mingled. Their attitude became even more cautiously discriminative than that of their predecessors, the main change being, in most cases, an increased severity : he was, on the whole, less admired, and more keenly criticized³⁰.

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He was far from being blindly admired even by his most sympathetic critic, Dr. Richard Hurd. Hurd had long been acquainted

third on Gray's borrowing from the *Davideis* (I, IV, p. 465); the fourth on his use of Cowley's latin verse (I, IV, p. 119).

The main points of contact may be here indicated :

Cf. *Elegy*, l. 48, and *The Resurrection*, st. 2; l. 121, and *On the Death of Mr. William Hervey*, st. 10; and, in one of the suppressed stanzas (Aldine ed., p. 104), *Dav.* II, l. 824.

— *Of Spring*, st. 5, 7, and *The Swallow*, and also *Dav.* I, l. 820.

— *Progress of Poesy*, l. 1, and *Dav.* III, l. 785...; l. 52, and *Brutus*, st. 4; l. 87... and *Nemean Ode*, st. 7; l. 110, and *The Prophet*, st. 2.

— *The Bard*, l. 19, 20, and *Dav.* II, l. 801.

29. *The Bee. Being Essays on the most interesting subjects*. London, 1759 (N° 8, p. 241).

30. Cf. A. H. Nethercot's paper on « *The Reputation of the Metaphysical Poets* » during the Age of Johnson and the « *Romantic Revival* » [*Studies in Philology*, January 1925, vol. XXII, pp. 81-132].

with Cowley when he undertook to make a selection from his works. As early as 1751, his opinion of the poet had already taken its definite form. He loved his mind, the natural trend of his genius, and lamented his failure which he thought due to external causes : the bad taste of his age, and the dangerous models he chose. He showed himself to be in complete agreement with Pope's last hints, using his very phrases :

... The natural unaffected turn of Mr. Cowley's manner, and the tender sensibility of his mind, are equally seen and loved in his prose-works, and in such of his poems as were written after a good model, or came from the heart. A clear sparkling fancy, softened with a shade of melancholy, made him perhaps of all our poets the most capable of excelling in the elegiac way, or of touching us in any way where a vein of easy language and moral sentiment is required. Who but laments then to see this fine genius perverted by the prevailing pedantry of his age, and carried away, against the bias of his nature, to an emulation of the rapturous, high-spirited Pindar ? ³¹.

In 1759 he published some *Moral and Political Dialogues*, and in the second of these, Cowley and Sprat were shown discussing on retirement, Cowley of course remaining faithful to his seclusion. In his notes to this dialogue, Hurd voiced his admiration for some of the poet's works. He thought *The Complaint*, for instance, « one of the prettiest of Cowley's smaller poems », because of its « air of melancholy », but set the *Essays* above all :

Lords and wits may decide of the qualities of Mr. Cowley's *head*, as they please; but, so long as these *Essays* remain, they will oblige all honest men to love *the language of his heart* ³².

We may now comprehend the whole meaning of his selection. It was this sincere love for a definite part of the poet's production,

31. *On the Marks of Imitation* (A dissertation appended to his commentary upon the *Poetical Art* of Horace, published in 1766).

32. *Moral and Political Dialogues* : being the substance of several conversations between divers eminent persons of the past and present Age... London, 1759 (1771 ed., I, p. 131, n., and 126, n.).

The estimate he jotted down for himself in his commonplace book (to be found printed in the *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Rev. Richard Hurd*... by the Rev. Francis Kilvert... London, 1860, p. 240...), bears out his public utterances. To him Cowley was « a remarkable instance of the hurt which immoderate praise does to a poet », for he ever strove to live up to his reputation, and this led him into his worst errors.

which led him to present it before the world in an easily accessible form. In his own words : « Everything he wrote is either so good or so bad that, in all reason, a separation should be made ». And we may also guess on what principles this selection was based, knowing that he thought Cowley's taste « naturally excellent », but perverted by that of his age, « which was the worst imaginable », and that what should please us more still than his talent was his « moral air and tender sensibility of mind ». We are therefore little surprised at his leaving out altogether *The Mistress* and the *Davideis*, to his mind the most artificial of his poems, while he selected those where he could best discover the true thoughts and feelings of the man ³³. His selection was thus led along strict lines, and included but « a small collection ». Even there, besides, and though he freely suppressed what displeased him, here detached lines, here whole stanzas ³⁴, he could not enjoy everything and courageously mentioned his objections. His sympathy did not blind him to the claims of justice and truth.

Reading through his notes we gather that he chiefly disliked the excessive ingenuity of the poet. He regretted « the false wit and quaint imagery » in which the hymn *To Light* « too much abounds ». He abhorred « equivoques », and felt shocked at the idle lengthening out of conceits ³⁵. He deplored that Cowley's poetry should often be « much disfigured by the double affectation of wit and familiarity ». « He would say an out-of-the-way thing, in a trivial manner » ³⁶. For this reason, he thought Cowley ought never to have attempted writing odes, and he warned readers by presenting his *Pindarics* as « an exquisite sort of

33. *Select Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley*. In two volumes. With a preface and notes by the editor. London, 1772.

34. He thus suppressed sixteen lines of *The Motto* (p. 107); the last two stanzas of the ode *Of Wit* (p. 113); the end of the elegy on Jordan (p. 117), and part of the third stanza of the ode *To the Royal Society* (p. 207).

35. Cf. on the hymn *To light*, I, p. 196; on an « equivoque » twice repeated, I, p. 194, and 211.

36. I, p. 175. Cf. also, p. 198, on the « post-angel » : « One of the most glaring faults in the poetry of Mr. Cowley's age was the debasing of great sentiments and images by low allusions and vulgar expressions. What the reader looked for was wit; and he looked no farther... » (It must be noticed that Cowley's age is as much censured as Cowley's own weakness in yielding to its bad taste).

poetry, to which his *style* was very ill suited; being, for the most part, careless, and sometimes affectedly vulgar »³⁷. Even when Cowley announced his intention of translating Horace's first satire « in his own familiar stile », Hurd put us on our guard :

Mr. Cowley has succeeded better in copying this *familiar style*, than most others, but he sometimes mistakes *vulgar*, or *careless*, at least, for familiar...³⁸.

As to Cowley's versification, Hurd ever and again reproved him for his halting rhythms and rough verse. Yet he acknowledged that Cowley was not without some excuses :

... It has been generally supposed that Mr. Cowley had no ear for harmony, and even no taste of elegant expression. And one should be apt to think so, from his untuned and rugged style : but the case was only this : Donne and Jonson were the favourite poets of the time, and therefore the models, on which our poet was ambitious to form himself. But unhappily these poets *affected* harsh numbers and uncouth expression; and what they affected, easily came to be looked upon as beauties...³⁹.

Cowley himself was hardly responsible for his faults : they were those of his age. But his good qualities were all his own, and Hurd of course took care to point them out. He gladly mentioned images in which Cowley's judgment had kept his wit within bounds, and drew attention to the « wonderfully fine » lines which revealed his poetic genius in its true light, pointing out for example the skilful change in the rhythm of such a line as :

And the soft wings of peace cover him round,

explaining :

... Those that have *purged ears*, will know, without being told, that the *Trochee*, in the fourth place, though against rule, has, on this occasion, a better effect than the *Iambus* would have had⁴⁰.

37. I, p. 159. Cf. also, p. 178, note *a*, and p. 193, n. *m*.

38. II, p. 219.

39. I, p. 163. Of Cowley's frequent use of « apostrophation », he said : « our poet *affected* these contractions, and, if we may believe the writer of his Life, fancied they gave a strength and energy to his verse. The true reason for his use of them was that he found them in fashion » (I, p. 110). Cf. also II, p. 160, about the changes of accent in words since the seventeenth century.

40. I, p. 173; II, p. 138, and p. 160.

But Hurd was inclined to admire Cowley chiefly for purposes that were not purely artistic. He enjoyed the playfulness of *The Chronicle*, and the grace of the *Anacreontics*, because they showed that « the author wanted neither ease of expression, nor the grace of numbers, when he followed the bent of his own taste and genius »⁴¹. He found in the hymn *To Light* a mixture of sentimental and moral elements which delighted him, and of the elegy on Hervey he said : « This poem came from the heart, and is therefore more natural and pleasing than most others in the collection »⁴². Most of all he admired the poems published together with the *Essays*. He thought them « with all their seeming negligence of *style* and *numbers*, extremely elegant... The prevailing character of them is that of the author, *a sensible reflecting melancholy* ». The story of Aglaüs delighted him : « These concluding eight lines are written in the author's best manner, which is (as I have several times observed), when he expresses his own *feeling*, along with his ideas »; and no less the « protestation » of humility in the essay *Of Greatness* : « why are these verses in every one's mouth, but because they are *the language of the heart* »?

So, even more than his literary talent, Hurd loved his sweet moral teaching, and, as he said, « his tender sensibility of mind ». This preference, just as it dictated the selection he made among his verse, also determined the place he gave his prose (in the two slender volumes, it spread over the whole of the second, and more than a fourth of the first). He praised it throughout, from the *Discourse*, in which he descried « a warm vein of eloquence », to the lower plane of the prefaces, and above all the *Essays* :

... In these discourses (as in everything, indeed, which Mr. Cowley wrote in prose) we have a great deal of good sense, embellished by a lively, but very natural expression. The sentiments flow from the heart, and, generally, in a vein of pure and proper English.

As an essayist, Hurd even placed Cowley above « Montagne » :

41. Cf. I, p. 128, 142. Of *The Chronicle* he said : « Nothing is more famous in our days, than Cowley's *Mistresses* ».

42. Cf. I, p. 203, and I, p. 117.

43. Cf. II, p. 111, 179. Cf. also, II, p. 108, 196.

... The French essayist drew his own picture out of *vanity*; and a preposterous one, too, as the likeness does him no honour : our amiable countryman gave us his, out of the *abundance of a good heart*, which overflowed with all the sentiments of probity and virtue ⁴⁴.

We have dealt at length upon the attitude of Hurd towards Cowley because it may rightly be considered as symbolic of his age. The Cowley he revived in his selection was a new one, discovered indeed by Pope, but now for the first time revealed fully. Like other neo-classicists, Hurd was a severe judge of his poetry, and practically condemned it. The baseless fabric of Cowley's wit shocked his reasonableness and his longing for « natural » thoughts and expression. As a lyric poet, Cowley had ceased to be esteemed, save for his familiar verse : the *Anacreontics*, *The Chronicle*, and the poems accompanying the *Essays*. And even these were accepted rather because of their contents than for their artistic merits.

Excluded from the realms of art, Cowley was given a renewed life on moral grounds. It is most significant that Wesley included him among the teachers of his *Christian Library*, and that the editor of his *Select Works* was also a distinguished Churchman. It might almost be said that Cowley had become « a clergyman's poet ». His natural, unaffected virtue was held up as an example. Lessons in morality were taught from his *Essays*. Were they not, all things considered, a skilful adaptation of pagan philosophy to Christian morals? They gratified in the most pleasing manner the moralizing tendencies of the age.

They gratified its sentimental requirements as well. Pope had already praised « the language of his heart ». Hurd was most eager to enjoy « his tender sensibility of mind ». His sympathy was centred on the poet's personality, his inmost thoughts and feelings, his whole attitude towards life. He never grew weary of insisting on his sensitiveness, his refreshing delight in natural scenes, his melancholy outlook on human existence. He took, as it were, a pre-romantic interest in these traits of Cowley's character, turning him into a romantic hero, whom life had grievously

44. Cf. II, p. 1, his appreciation on the *Discourse*; I, p. 91, on the preface to *Cutter of Coleman Street*; on the *Essays* : II, p. 83, 195, 261, 262...

wounded, and who sought for a solace to his dejection in the solitary contemplation of nature ⁴⁵.

Thus whereas the brilliant « Wit » of the Restoration was buried under neo-classical sarcasms, there rose in his stead a pensive, tender-hearted man, chiefly to be esteemed for his smaller poems, and the homely prose of his moral essays. It is on the whole true to say that the later eighteenth century approvingly emphasized the judgment Pope had passed on Cowley in a few telling lines.

Hurd's selection did not, however, pass unchallenged. Reviewers attacked it, as any selection is liable to attack, because of the choice made among Cowley's works ⁴⁶. *The Monthly Review*, for instance, regretted that he had left out *The Mistress* altogether. For, while deploring the presence in the collection of « many loose and nugatory pieces », the reviewer discovered in it « many beautiful parts which might have been selected, many marks of tenderness, ingenuity, and enthusiasm, that might have been preserved, independently of the title, and the licentious idea of *The Mistress* », and maintained that, « the severity of the Editor's virtue appears, in this matter, to have prevailed over his judgment ». He specially relished the third and last stanzas in *The Despair*, in which there is « something so strongly picturesque and expressive of the subject, something so morally mournful, that it could not possibly escape the celebrated Richardson, who has given them a place in his *Clarissa* ». And while apparently agreeing with Hurd in the reasons why he liked Cowley, he went so far as to reproach him, and Pope himself, with not having understood Cowley aright. They liked him for his « moral air and tender sensibility of mind », but he was chiefly admirable for « the genuine spirit of enthusiasm that breathes

45. This position was to receive an extreme illustration in a review of A. Kippis's edition of the *Biographia Britannica*, where, after calling Cowley « the amiable, the sentimental Cowley », the author asserted : « those who can read him without feeling an interest in his soothing melancholy can have no hearts; those who can continue to read him without disgust, can have no taste » (*The Critical Review*, 1790, vol. LXIX, p. 392).

46. Johnson first opposed it on the ground that selecting meant mutilating, but he grew reconciled with the notion (Cf. Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, Oxford, 1887, III, p. 29, 227).

through all those pages, where the poet is not professedly in chace of wit »⁴⁷.

A writer in *The Gentleman's Magazine* also pointed out the shortcomings of Hurd's selection :

... Tho' he has cleared the works from many false thoughts, ill-plac'd wit, and great puerilities, yet surely he has deprived us of many fine flights of true poetry, and of some peculiar marks which distinguish him from every other poet.

But in June of the same year (1776), Hurd was stoutly supported, and the judiciousness of his selection brought out⁴⁸.

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There were, obviously, differences of opinion concerning what was best in Cowley's works; but these were on the whole of little importance. The necessity of making a choice was universally recognized, the discriminative attitude of Hurd was that of every critic, and, we may say, of every reader of the age. What distinguished critics from one another, better than their opinions, was the temper they exhibited in expressing them. While some, among whom Hurd stood foremost, were eager to recognize the talent of Cowley, though they could not help mentioning his defects, others, mainly to be found among University critics, pushed his faults to the front, and inveighed against them whenever they found an opportunity.

Whole-hearted enthusiasts, such as were to be found in the preceding periods, were now most exceptional. Theophilus Cibber actually printed in 1753 an account of Cowley which seemed contemporary with Sprat's or Langbaine's raptures. After praising him for his perfect morality, he endeavoured to show that his neglect was most unaccountable : « It is no compliment to the

47. *The Monthly Review*. London, 1773 (vol. XLVIII, p. 10-18). Cowley was even made to protest against Hurd in person, vehemently claiming admittance for such of his poems as *Life and Fame*, and *Against Hope* (In one of Philip Parson's *Dialogues of the Dead with the Living*. London..., 1779, p. 151-160).

48. *The Gentleman's Magazine*. March 1776 (vol. XLVI, p. 115), and June (*Ibid.*, p. 267).

taste of the present age that the works of Mr. Cowley are falling into disesteem » : for Cowley had more « wit » and « good sense » than any fashionable poet of the day. In light poetry, nothing could excel *The Mistress* : « No love-verses, in our language, have so much true wit, and expressive tenderness, as Cowley's *Mistress*, which is indeed perfect in its kind. » In grave poetry, « which demands extensive thinking », neither Pope nor Dryden could vie with him : « there are more ideas in one of Cowley's Pindaric odes, than in any piece of equal length by those two great genius's (St Caecilia's Ode excepted) ». The *Odes* were no longer read merely because they asked too much of the common reader⁴⁹.

Such encomiastic fervour must have sounded very strange and old-fashioned to readers in 1753, setting at defiance as it did all the universally accepted and cherished classical principles. Even the *London Magazine*, in spite of its tame adherence to Cibber's views, could not refrain from qualifying his praise, by stating : « He [Cowley] is blamed for a redundancy of wit and roughness of versification... »⁵⁰. This limitation, with its insistence on the two faults of Cowley, his lack of self-restraint in thought and of harmony in numbers, brings us back at once to the atmosphere of the time. Let us not forget, however, the keen appreciation of his talent, which made up, and for some persons more than made up, for his shortcomings.

It might be thought, no doubt, that the author of *The Poetical Scale* — was it Goldsmith ? — had been over-indulgent when giving Cowley 17 out of 20 for judgment, and 17 for versification, even though one might have approved of the 17 he was given for genius, and 15 for learning⁵¹. Yet, when Joseph Warton, in the

49. *Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland...* London, 1753 (II, p. 55...).

50. *The London Magazine, or Monthly Intelligence*. August 1754 (vol. XXIII, p. 342). The hymn *To Light* was selected for praise.

51. This *Scale* was published in the *Literary Magazine : or, Universal Review* : from January to August 1758 (vol. III, p. 6). It gave marks to poets for their genius, judgment, learning, and versification, out of twenty : « of which — so the notice ran — 19 may be attained... but the 20th was never yet attained. » It gave rather remarkable results. Pope came first with a total sum of 70, followed by Milton and Dryden, each with 69, and Addison, 68. Immediately after came together Shakespeare, Cowley, and Swift, with 66, while Spenser gained only 62 marks, Chaucer, Jouson, and Waller remaining far below.

Dedication of his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, also attempted a classification of the English poets, he ranked Cowley among the second class of writers, with Dryden, Donne, Denham and Congreve, after those of the first order : Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton (and, strange to say, Otway and Lee), before a third class which comprised such names as Prior, Waller, and Swift. And, while the first class included the most powerful geniuses, those who reached the « sublime » and the « pathetic », the second was composed of « such as possessed the true poetical genius in a more moderate degree, but have noble talents for moral and ethical poetry » ⁵².

The Monthly Review for June 1756 disputed this « scale », objecting to Dryden being placed below Otway and Lee, and to Donne and Congreve being allowed into the second class ⁵³. But the writer thought Cowley fully deserved his high position : « There can be no objection to the rank assigned that excellent genius, whose works are a valuable mine of literary and poetic jewels », and later in the article he vindicated his assertion by praising the *Anacreontics*. Further still, he emphasized Cowley's merit as a prose-writer. Warton having said of the age of Charles II : « Our style in prose was but beginning to be polished », he commented :

If Cowley had not wrote Essays, Dryden Prefaces, Clarendon his Controversial Pieces and his History, we should, perhaps, have agreed with our Author ⁵⁴.

Such a spirited defence shows that Cowley still found strong supporters. Warton himself was far from underrating him, for, some years later, when writing the second volume of the *Essay* he acknowledged the « happy talent » Cowley had « of imitating the easy manner of Horace's Epistolary writings ». He also praised his prose-works as being « full of pleasing and virtuous sentiments, expressed without any affectation; so that he appears

52. *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*. In two volumes. By Joseph Warton, D. D. (the first vol. was issued in 1756, the second in 1782).

53. Of Donne he said : « Did any man with a poetical ear, ever yet read ten lines of Donne without disgust ? or are there ten lines of poetry in all his works ? »

54. *The Monthly Review*, for June and July 1756, vol. XIV, p. 528...; and vol. XV, p. 57...).

to be one of the best prose-writers of his time», and besides, « they give us the most amiable idea both of his abilities and his heart ».

For all his sympathy, he could not esteem Cowley faultless. Dryden, it may be remembered, had accused Cowley with despising Chaucer.

I am not surprised, Warton comments, at this strange judgment. Cowley was indisputably a genius, but his taste was perverted and narrowed by a love of witticisms.

One part of his works he could not suffer was the *Pindaric odes*: « they cannot be perused with patience by a lover of antiquity », and he reproached him with having imitated Martial more than Virgil in his Books of Plants, hardly rising above the former's epigrammatic style. While censuring him, he deeply regretted he had to do it :

It is painful to censure a writer of so amiable a mind, such integrity of manners, and such a sweetness of temper. His fancy was brilliant, strong, and sprightly; but his taste false and unclassical, even though he had much learning ⁵⁵.

Let us mark the note of sadness in Warton's words, as well as his insistence upon the charm of the man : two features now grown familiar to us, which give one more proof of the lasting impression he had made on those who had known him, as well as on those who now divined him through his *Essays*.

The most sympathetic critics, like Hurd, or Warton, had to temper their praise with such reservations. Nor were they alone. David Baker, for instance, defined Cowley's wit as « genuine and natural »; unfortunately, owing both to his youth and the troubled times he lived in,

his versification is frequently rough and incorrect, and the redundancy of his fancy outrunning the power of his expression, this latter appears sometimes puerile, and even flat and insipid.

But he still admired his pindaric way of writing :

55. *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope...* (1806 ed., II, p. 40, p. 41 n., p. 42, p. 7, n.). Warton's favourable judgment on Cowley, as expressed in the second volume may in part result from the influence of Johnson's life of the poet, published, as we shall see, in 1779.

However faulty he may sometimes be in respect to numbers, he has never yet been excelled in the force of his figures, and the sublimity of his stile and sentiments ⁵⁶.

In the Rev. James Granger's opinion, Cowley « who helped to corrupt the taste of the age in which he lived, and had himself been corrupted by it, was a remarkable instance of true genius, seduced and perverted by false wit ». Granger placed the *Anacreontics* and the *Essays* above all the rest, as also the Latin poems, which, he said, « are esteemed the best of his works » ⁵⁷. The same preference for the *Anacreontics* and the prose was shown by Nathan Drake, who, however, took a very pessimistic view of Cowley's reputation. He had been much praised, with Cartwright, in his time :

What is now their fate ? To be utterly neglected, and, except to those who justly think it necessary to be intimate with every stage of our literature, nearly unknown ⁵⁸.

Andrew Kippis gave his approval to Hurd's selection, but much qualified it by stating : « That selection is all that, for our own part, we ever wish to read again of Cowley. » He thought his complete works might well be left for ladies to read, there to discover « occasional beauties, disperst amidst his most defective compositions » ⁵⁹.

David Hume proved a more ruthless judge still. In his *Essays on Simplicity and Refinement*, he expressed his dislike of Cowley's metaphysical ingenuities by stating : « It is sufficient to run over Cowley once; but Parnell, after the fiftieth reading, is as fresh as at the first » ⁶⁰. In his *History of England* he aggravated the

56. *The Companion to the Playhouse*. Or, an historical Account of all the dramatic writers (and their works) that have appeared in Great-Britain and Ireland... London, 1764 (Reprinted in 1812 under the title *Biographia Dramatica*. The account of Cowley is in vol. I, p. 150-154).

57. *A Biographical History of England, from Egbert the Great to the Revolution...* By the Rev. James Granger... London, 1769 (vol. II, p. 334).

58. *Literary Hours* : or, Sketches, critical, narrative and poetical, by Nathan Drake. The third ed. London, 1804 (II, p. 169).

59. *Biographia Britannica*. Or, the Lives of the most eminent Persons who have flourished in Great-Britain and Ireland, from the earliest ages to the present times... The second ed. with corrections, enlargements, and the addition of new lives. By Andrew Kippis... London, 1789 (vol. IV, p. 366-382).

60. *Essays. On Simplicity and Refinement* (1870 ed., p. 116).

attack by maintaining, not only that « Cowley was « an author extremely corrupted by the bad taste of his age », which was the current opinion, but that, in any case, « he must always have been a very indifferent poet ». First, « he had no ear for harmony »; then, « in the rugged, untuneable numbers are conveyed sentiments the most strained and distorted : long-spun allegories, distant allusions, and forced conceits ». This devastating criticism was in part qualified, for Hume could not help liking the *Anacreontics* and the *Essays* : « A few Anacreontics surprise us by their ease and gaiety... »; the prose-writings please « by the honesty and goodness which they express, and even by their spleen and melancholy »⁶¹. As early as June 1757, the *Critical Review*, had shelved him, together with Davenant and Denham, among the « indifferent poets »⁶².

An attack on *The Mistress*, as being over-ingenious, was printed in *The Annual Register* for 1767; John Nichols condemned the false wit of Cowley's academical poems, which he nevertheless included in his *Select Collection of Poems*; even his latinity was questioned by Thomas Warton, who thought Milton's latin style vastly superior, owing to his « right thinking »⁶³. More unexpected was Francis Fawkes's objection to the *Anacreontics* as being very imperfect translations⁶⁴.

As to the *Pindaric odes*, *The Gentleman's Magazine* deplored that Cowley had become « a lackey to Pindar »⁶⁵. Robert Heron condemned Waller as having « no merit » : « the whole edition of his works may be thrown into the fire, without any diminution of English Poetry ». He then declared : « Cowley's Pindarics may accompany Waller's with all my heart ». Yet he also confessed :

61. David Hume, *History of England* (1826 ed., vol. VII, p. 339. — First ed. 1761). Hume made use of Cowley's *Discourse*, taking his character of Cromwell as expressed by the bad Angel of the Vision. But he strangely enough thought fit to correct Cowley's prose-style by emendations of his own.

62. *Critical Review*, June 1757 (vol. III, p. 496); in a review of Dr. Smollett's *Complete History of England*.

63. *The Annual Register*, 1767 (vol. X, p. 220). John Nichols. *A Select Collection of Poems...* London, 1781 (vol. VII, p. 70). — *Poems upon Several Occasions...* by John Milton... With notes, critical and explanatory, and other illustrations, by Thomas Warton... London, 1785 (Preface, p. xvi, xviii).

64. *The Works of Anacreon*. Translated by Francis Fawkes (Chalmers. *English Poets*, vol. XX, p. 331. Introduction).

65. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1760 (vol. XXX, p. 146).

« One or two of his Anacreontics are good »⁶⁶. Even in France Voltaire protested against Cowley being called the English Pindar. M. de Chabanon having written :

Cowley (le Pindare des Anglais) fut admiré de son vivant, aujourd'hui on ne le lit presque plus.

Voltaire answered :

Vous appelez Cowley le Pindare Anglais; vous lui faites bien de l'honneur : c'était un poète sans harmonie, qui cherchait à mettre de l'esprit partout. Le vrai Pindare est Dryden⁶⁷.

The *Dauids*, too seemed quite dead. Henry Headley, making up a classification of the English Poets from 1558 to 1660, ranked Cowley among the « amatory and miscellaneous poets », and left him out of the epic poets, though he had included Davenant, together with Spenser and Milton⁶⁸. William Hayley was not wholly unfavourable to the poem, though most sarcastic in his commendation :

Ingenuous Cowley, the fond dupe of wit,
Seems like a vapour o'er the field to flit;
In David's praise he strikes some Epic notes,
But soon down Lethe's stream their dying murmur floats⁶⁹.

His name seemed naturally to call up the notion of perverted taste. Thus, in a review of Sterne's *Posthumous Works of a late Genius deceased*, we come across such a sentence as this :

I remember when I thought Horace and Catullus flat and insipid — but then it was when I admired Martial and Cowley⁷⁰.

Such indictments were readily endorsed and aggravated by the masters of the craft, University professors or schoolmasters, who

66. *Letters of Literature*. By Robert Heron, esq. London, 1785 (p. 130).

67. *Les Odes Pythiques de Pindare*, traduites avec des remarques par M. de Chabanon... Paris, 1772 (Discours préliminaire, p. 58). Voltaire's answer lies in a letter addressed to de Chabanon, March 9, 1772 (*Œuvres de Voltaire*, nouvelle édition... Paris, 1882, vol. XLVIII, p. 42).

68. *Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry*... London, 1787 (Introduction, p. xv).

69. *An Essay on Epic Poetry*... London, 1782 (p. 64).

70. *The Critical Review*, vol. XXIX (1770), p. 104.

dictated *ex-cathedra* the rules of « correct » English poetry, and dogmatically judged the works of poets, lavish in censure, and sparing of their praise. Cowley was cruelly handled by them. His faults mattered more in their eyes than his virtues. In fact, they often chose Cowley as a kind of scape-goat, concentrating upon him their contempt of former ages, seeking among his verse for illustrations of the errors a « correct » poet should avoid. Most of their papers or lectures might be entitled, after No. 121 of Johnson's *Rambler* : « On the Dangers of imitation, and the Impropriety of imitating Cowley ».

Professor H. Blair, in his lectures at the University of Edinburgh, warned his audience against : « harsh or forced metaphors », because « they puzzle the reader, and instead of illustrating the thought, render it perplexed and intricate ». And he added :

... With metaphors of this kind Cowley abounds. He and some writers of his age, seem to have considered it as the perfection of wit, to hit upon likenesses between objects which no other person could have discovered; and at the same time, to pursue those metaphors so far, that it requires some ingenuity to follow them out, and comprehend them. This makes a metaphor resemble an enigma.

Dealing with comparisons, he said :

... Nothing is more opposite to the design of this figure than to hunt after a great number of coincidences in minute points, merely to show how far the poet's wit can stretch the resemblance. This is Mr. Cowley's common fault; whose comparisons generally run out so far as to become rather a studied exercise of wit, than an illustration of the principal object. We need only open his works, his Odes especially, to find instances everywhere.

He had no high regard for these *Odes* : « Cowley, at all times harsh, is doubly so in his Pindaric compositions. » He was bound to add, however, when coming to the *Anacreontics* :

... In his Anacreontic Odes he is much happier. They are smooth and elegant, and indeed, the most agreeable and the most perfect, in their kind, of all Mr. Cowley's poems ⁷¹.

71. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*. By Hugh Blair. D. D. London, 1783 (I, p. 303, 350, II, p. 357).

Lord Kames (Henry Home), in order to gather instances of bad taste, almost confined himself to a study of *The Mistress*. Wanting to denounce the danger of introducing ludicrous notions into a serious poem, he discovered a ready proof in *The Vain Love*. Protesting against « jingles of words », « expressions that have no meaning, or no distinct meaning », he found the requisite examples in *The Request*, or *My Picture*. The wilful confusion between two possible meanings of a word or an image, was illustrated from *The Long Life*, *The Tree*, *Weeping*. Thus the critic went on, mercilessly using Cowley's verse as a kind of storehouse of errors in judgment and taste ⁷².

James Beattie seemed more humane. Though he condemned the taste of Cowley, he praised his talent :

... He abounds in tender thoughts, beautiful lines, and emphatical expressions, his wit is inexhaustible, and his learning extensive; but his taste is generally barbarous, and seems to have been formed upon such models as Donne, Martial, and the worst parts of Ovid : nor is it possible to read his longer poems with pleasure, while we retain any relish for the simplicity of Antient composition ⁷³.

He had read the *Davideis*, however, as he laid bare some technical blemishes in it ⁷⁴. Like Blair, he declared the *Odes* « destitute of harmony, simplicity, and every other classical grace », but felt that « his imitations of Anacreon are almost the only parts of him that are now remembered or read » ⁷⁵.

The Davideis again furnished George Campbell with samples of descriptions « exaggerated to absurdity » — such as the portrait of Envy —, and even of « learned nonsense » — such as the definition of Eternity as an « Eternal now » ⁷⁶.

72. *Elements of Criticism*. Edinburgh, 1762 (5th ed. 1774, I, p. 387, 395, II, p. 317...). Dr. A. Gerard also took him as a pattern of « incorrection in taste » (*An Essay on Taste*. The second ed. Edinburgh, 1764).

73. *Essays*. By James Beattie. Edinburgh, 1776. *On Poetry and Music as they affect the mind* (p. 494).

74. *Ibid.*, p. 399, 420, 547. He also objected to his versification, as well as to that of Denham, and even to that of Waller : « Of Waller, it can only be said, that he is not harsh; of Denham and Cowley, if a few couplets were struck out of their works, we could not say so much... » (p. 360).

75. *Ibid.*, p. 495.

76. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. By George Campbell... a new ed. Edinburgh, 1816, I, p. 180, II, p. 95... (The passages referred to are in *Dav.*, I, l. 222... and I, l. 362).

Among this Scotch chorus, half-sarcastic, half-indignant, an English voice was heard, that of the Rev. Vicesimus Knox, and Knox can hardly be said to have been more indulgent to Cowley than his northern brethren. His article « *On the merits of Cowley as a poet* » began with a criticism of Sprat's *Account*, which, « by placing Cowley in the first rank of poets, has in effect degraded him from the subaltern station which he had else preserved unmolested ». So that Cowley was actually denied even this « subaltern station ». Knox's attack was hurled against the *Odes* :

... That he could ever be esteemed as a Pindaric poet, is a curious literary phenomenon. He totally mistook his own genius when he thought of imitating Pindar. He totally mistook the genius of Pindar, when he thought his own incoherent sentiments and numbers bore the least resemblance to the wild, yet regular sublimity of the Theban... Wit of any kind would be improperly displayed in such compositions; but to increase the absurdity, the wit of Cowley is often false...

His Pindaric verse is « prose run mad ». Here and there « a fine expression, a truly poetical thought, an harmonious couplet » may be found, but, more often, « a tedious assemblage of disproportioned and discordant stanzas ». If only, Knox argued, instead of Pindar he had followed Tibullus ! « The tenderness of love, and the soft language of complaint were adapted to his genius. » His Latin poetry was elegant without reaching the sublime : « ... and I must confess I have read some of his Latin verses with more pleasure than any of English afforded ». In his prose-works, he proved...

... an elegant, a pleasing, a judicious writer... his love of retirement and contemplation qualified him for a moralist... The language of his heart shines forth in the little he has left us, and we cannot but love it... It is written in a style sufficiently flowing to prove that Cowley was not destitute of a musical ear : a circumstance which countenances the opinion of those who maintain that he affected a rugged style ⁷⁷.

On the whole, this learned body of critics brought no very considerable addition to our knowledge of Cowley. The ideas they expressed were for the greater part far from new, the judgments they passed had already been uttered more than once. Their tone

77. *Essays, moral and literary*. London, 1779 (vol. II, essay VII, p. 76-83).

and mood alone might be called a novelty. They were dogmatic and haughty, they obviously felt little sympathy and less pity for poor Cowley. Coldly dissecting his works, with a view to insisting more on the diseased than on the healthy parts, they created round him an atmosphere of hostility and abruptness which he had till then been spared. It might be said, no doubt, that their very insistence constituted an involuntary homage paid to the influence still exerted by him. They denounced him so vehemently because they knew him to be an active force, and therefore a danger. Dryden had first made this point clear, and the necessity they felt of repeating the same warning, nearly a hundred years later, would prove how obstinately faithful to him had been part of the reading public. They represented the extreme point of neo-classical estrangement from Cowley. But they were not truly representative of the general attitude the age took up as regards the poet ⁷⁸.

III

We could not find a better exponent of the views then held about him than Dr. Johnson in his well-known *Life*. It is hardly necessary to point out the outstanding value of this, the first full account of Cowley since Sprat's biography. His criticism brought little new light on the poet's worth and significance. Though it went deeper and stretched further than that of other critics, it developed along strictly orthodox lines; but such estimates as he shared with most of his contemporaries derived as it were a renewed interest from his stronger personality, and became forthwith authoritative. For the Doctor occupied towards Cowley the same position that he occupied towards English letters in general, and indisputably towered in this sphere as in others, above all his fellow-critics.

His first utterances upon the subject were not of first rate

78. The net outcome of their campaign may perhaps be found in such curt accounts as this, taken from *The Gentleman's Magazine* for January 1795 (vol. LXV, p. 17): « The first name on the list [i. e. Johnson's *Lives of the English poets*] is Cowley. This writer is ranked among the metaphysical poets: his wit is factitious, his genius artificial, if I may so express myself... »

importance, yet they contained valuable information as to what his definite appreciation would be. The first we have traced is a remark on the desire Cowley had expressed in the 1656 preface of his book to seek for peace in an American colony. The inveterate Londoner could not understand how Cowley might want to leave the town, and attributed his unhappiness not to external causes but to his own restlessness, thus preparing us for the want of sympathy with Cowley's rural wisdom which is betrayed by the rather abrupt paragraph on the *Essays* towards the close of his *Life* ⁷⁹.

In fact, Johnson, contrary to Hurd, scarcely paid any attention to Cowley as a moralist or a sentimentalist. He was merely concerned with his art, it might even be said, his technique. So that we shall find in his appreciation of Cowley nothing but the strict neo-classical outlook. And what his views were to be, on that subject, was foreshadowed in a paper on Milton's prosody, where, protesting against « mixed measures », that is to say, disyllabic feet other than iambs, he denounced as « remarkably inharmonious » the line which Hurd thought so charmingly musical :

And the soft wings of peace cover him round.

We may detect here the wish for an inexorably regular rhythm, the wish of a man whose dull ear could not perceive the subtler harmonies brought in by the very breaks in this rhythm; and we may at once guess that he was to experience great difficulty in forming an apt appreciation of Cowley's metrical talent ⁸⁰.

Coming closer to the core of his future criticism of Cowley, we find this passage :

... Cowley seems to have possessed the power of writing easily beyond any other of our poets, yet this pursuit of remote thoughts led him often into harshness of expression... ⁸¹.

Does not this sentence put in a nutshell the pages devoted to the

79. *The Rambler*, N° 6 (Saturday, April 7. 1750).

80. *The Rambler*, N° 87 (Quoted by Saintsbury. *A History of Criticism*, II, p. 481).

81. *The Idler*, N° 77 (Harrison's *British Classics*, VIII, p. 111).

metaphysical school of poetry, which were to make the *Life* so famous? As to his appreciation of Cowley's intellectual powers, it may be perceived in his saying, recorded by Boswell, that « there is more sense in a line of Cowley than in a page..... of Pope »⁸².

These few remarks made at intervals by Johnson seem to form the links in a chain of meditations which culminated in the *Life* of our poet. They show the distinctive features it was to have : a full sympathy for Cowley, and a meritorious effort at understanding and appreciating traits so foreign to his own nature as metaphysical wit, but hampered by a rigid notion of art and a belief that only through the neo-classical rules perfection could be reached, this conviction resulting in much unfavourable comment. Johnson could not help applying to Cowley tests which the poet was ignorant of, but this very shortcoming made his criticism the more representative of his dogmatic age.

The *Miscellanies* he thought unique in their diversity : « Such an assemblage of diversified excellence no other poet has hitherto afforded. To choose the best, among many good, is one of the most hazardous attempts of criticism. » He yet made his choice, praising above the rest the ode *Of Wit*, *The Chronicle*, and the elegy on Crashaw⁸³. He was not wholly pleased with the *Anacreontics*, in which Cowley « has given rather a pleasing than a faithful representation [of the original songs], having retained their spriteliness, but lost their simplicity ». Yet he added :

... These little pieces will be found more finished in their kind than any other of Cowley's works. The diction shews nothing of the mould of time, and the sentiments are at no great distance from our present habitudes of thought... The *Anacreontiques* therefore of Cowley give now all the pleasure which they ever gave. If he was formed by nature for one kind of writing more than for another, his power seems to have been greatest in the familiar and the festive⁸⁴.

82. Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, V., p. 345 (Johnson expressed this opinion towards 1773).

83. *Life of Cowley* (Muses' Library edition, p. 29, 30). He also mentioned *The Motto*, the verses *To Lord Falkland*..., the elegy on Sir Henry Wotton, the verses on Davenant, praising parts without praising the whole. But he thought the elegy on Hervey contained little traces of passion.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

He then proceeded to analyse *The Mistress*. These poems, written « with redundancy of wit, and with copiousness of learning », were, to him, intellectually admirable, but, « considered as the verses of a lover », to be condemned as « unnatural » :

... They are neither courtly nor pathetick, have neither gallantry nor fondness. His praises are too far-sought, and too hyperbolical, either to express love or to excite it...

In the *Odes* he perceived true poetic genius :

... He sometimes rises to dignity truly Pindarick, and, if some deficiencies of language be forgiven, his strains are such as those of the Theban bard were to his contemporaries...

But he also noticed their faults : the constant anti-climaxes to which the hunt after novelty at any cost condemned Cowley, and the mixture of noble and ignoble elements in his diction and even in his thought. His conclusion was a blending of admiration and censure — but by this time admiration needed the greater courage of the two — :

... Though the mode of their composition be erroneous, yet many parts deserve at least that admiration which is due to great comprehension of knowledge, and great fertility of fancy. The thoughts are often new, and often striking; but the greatness of one part is disgraced by the littleness of another; and total negligence of language gives the noblest conceptions the appearance of a fabric august in the plan, but mean in the materials. Yet surely those verses are not without a just claim to praise; of which it may be said with truth, that no man but Cowley could have written them⁸⁵.

As to the *Davideis*, Johnson first of all stated :

... There are not many examples of so great a work, produced by an author generally read, and generally praised, that has crept through a century with so little regard...,

the causes of this oblivion residing partly in the choice of the subject (Johnson opposed the notion of a work of fiction based on the Scriptures), and partly in the performance : for « nothing can be more disgusting than a narrative spangled with conceits,

85. *Ibid.*, p. 36-40.

and conceits are all that the Davideis supplies ». The conclusion reached by the critic was, as before, twofold :

... In the perusal of the Davideis, as of all Cowley's works, we find wit and learning unprofitably squandered. Attention has no relief; the affections are never moved; we are sometimes surprised, but never delighted, and find much to admire, but little to approve. Still, however, it is the work of Cowley, of a mind capacious by nature, and replenished by study ⁸⁶.

Technically he lamented the « carelessness » of Cowley in his diction and in his versification :

... It will be found that he wrote with abundant fertility, but negligent or unskilful selection; with much thought, but with little imagery ... His diction was in his own time censured as negligent... He makes no selection of words, nor seeks any neatness of phrase : he has no elegances, either lucky or elaborate... His versification seems to have had very little of his care... ⁸⁷.

Johnson's attention was centred upon the poems. Of Cowley's other achievements little was said : a passing thrust at the *Naufragium Jocularé*, « not loose verse, but mere prose », a rapid defence of the *Cutter of Coleman Street*, a comedy « which has certainly, in a very great degree, the power of fixing attention and exciting merriment », a comparison between the Latin of Cowley and Milton's, in which « the advantage seems to lie on the side of Cowley », and a short paragraph devoted to the praise of the *Essays*, which leaves us wondering why he did not dwell longer on the matter :

... His thoughts are natural, and his style has a smooth and placid equability, which has never yet obtained its due commendation. Nothing is far-sought, or hard-laboured; but all is easy without feebleness, and familiar without grossness ⁸⁸.

Like many of his forerunners, Johnson laid the blame of Cowley's defects on his « narrow views », by which he meant his yielding to the metaphysical fashion :

86. *Ibid.*, p. 41-47.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 47-50.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 3, 10, 9, 54.

... Cowley, like poets who have written with narrow views, and, instead of tracing intellectual pleasure to its natural sources in the mind of man, paid their court to temporary prejudices, has been at one time too much praised, and too much neglected at another...

He thus fell a victim to the dangerous pitfalls towards which a wrong conception of poetry led him, and wrote in the « metaphysical » style then prevalent.

Johnson's analysis was most original when he emphasized Cowley's adherence to the metaphysical school of verse. By studying him as a disciple of Donne, which had been till then but tentatively attempted, he first laid the stress upon his historical significance. Cowley (we may justly apply to him what the critic said of the metaphysical poets) stood in his eyes more like a man of learning than a poet. His only wish being « to say what he hoped had never been said before », he was mostly unable « to represent or move the affections ». The « sublime » and the « pathetic » were equally beyond his reach, for « his attempts were always analytick », he broke every image into fragments, « he dissected a sunbeam with a prism ». He might therefore sometimes rouse admiration, but never the pleasure to be expected from poetry. All his work was but « a voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange ». It truly deserved to be called « metaphysical ».

Nothing could be more abhorrent to one bred, like Dr. Johnson, in the worship of « Nature » and « Reason ». And indeed the Doctor made a strong point against this aspect of Cowley's poetry. It is therefore a significant proof of his qualities as a critic, and also of the reverence Cowley still inspired, that he could close his *Life* by the magnificent eulogy in which he fully brings out the value of Cowley's achievements and the range of his talent. In spite of all his faults, Cowley was still to him « a man of the first rank in learning and wit », not to be rivalled in many ways⁸⁹.

89. Johnson's opinions were not always accepted without demur. *The Monthly Review* for July 1779 (vol. LXI, p. 1...) regretted that he had not drawn attention to more beauties hidden in the *Davidéis*. *The Critical Review* for the same year declared that there was « rather too much quotation from parts of his works that are not the most entertaining » (vol. XLVII, p. 361). *The Chester Chronicle* for August 24. 1792 insisted on the value of the *Essays* and of the *Discourse*. Cf. also, A. H. Nethercot's article on *The Reputation of the « Metaphysical poets » during the Age of Johnson...*

Unfavourable as his account proved in some respects, hampered though it was by his dogmatic notions, Johnson showed in his appreciation a broad-mindedness, a desire to do Cowley justice, which happily contrasted with the carping censures some members of the tribe of critics had levelled at the poet. He did not allow his prejudices to blind him to the true poetic gifts of Cowley, and it may be said that, with a few reservations, his final judgment has held good to this day.

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As we have noticed already, the critics of this period differed more in their moods than in their doctrines. Cowley might be more or less gently handled, more or less esteemed, there were, in the main, no two opinions concerning him. The several estimates delivered on him may easily be gathered into one whole.

They brought no distinct change in his literary fortunes. But they gave a more complete and conscious shape to the ultimate verdict of the earlier half of the century. Whereas, between 1700 and 1750, Cowley still lived as a wit, and his *Odes* found admirers, the metaphysical aspect of his talent was now definitely excluded. Wit was no longer favourably linked with his name. His more ambitious poems, those which contained his deepest if strangest thoughts, those which he had written with the eager wish « to be for ever known », were no longer esteemed worth reading. Of his *Davideis* little was said, and that little was unfavourable. Cowley as an epic poet could be praised no longer. The *Pindaric odes* and *The Mistress* were still well-known, but, with a few exceptions, they were exposed to unsparing criticism. *The Mistress* was the prey of critics, as embodying all the faults which artificiality and unnaturalness in art could produce, and the *Odes* were hardly saved from a similar fate by the « purple patches » which had so long set Cowley as a happy rival of Pindar. It was generally acknowledged that the sublime was not within his reach, and Milton's natural genius was now and then contrasted with his own ambitious attempts.

His masterpieces were thus ruined. But, to take up one of his favourite metaphors, Phoenix-like he rose out of these ashes, born to a new life. New praises were addressed to him. The sternest

adversaries of his lofty flights bowed before his humblest works, which he himself had created as mere undignified play. The sprightly grace of the *Anacreontics* became his best title to poetic fame, the easy familiarity of his Latin epistles exhibited his scholarship in its best light, and above all his *Essays* and the rest of his prose-works proved him to have been one of the fathers of English prose, and displayed the hidden treasures of his mind and heart.

The reasons for this new-born admiration were, as we have seen, twofold. Pure form and a clear thought won the hearts of neo-classical devotees to a recognition of the truly classical worth of his lighter verse and familiar prose. But they were praised and cherished, too, from wholly opposite motives, because they revealed a tender, melancholy, sentimental lover of nature and solitude, and gratified aspirations which are best defined as romantic. That there was no deep gulf between these two reasons, however, was proved by the fact that the same men, such as Pope and Hurd, could easily reconcile both, discriminating among Cowley's works from a formal point of view, as neo-classical theorists, and yet loving his thought for its romantic tendencies. The paradox remains that Cowley was in part praised by neo-classical criticism for distinctly non-classical qualities.

It may be thought that the almost total rejection of his metaphysical poetry was carried out in an extreme manner. The tribunal at whose bar the poet was called, in their reaction against previous excesses and their hatred of the « gothic », proved rather too strict. Their rigid code, while it enabled them to appreciate the purity in the thought and style of Cowley, prevented them from giving their due place to his other qualities. Their sentence left his works unnecessarily diminished. Other parts were to emerge again, when a broader outlook would be permitted, showing him to be something more than a sweet anacreontic singer and moralist.

They were justified, however, in the place they allowed him among his peers. The earlier eighteenth century had been left doubting as to his ultimate worth. He was no longer ranked on a level with the greatest, but he still held a place much above « the common rout » of poets. They now reached a definite conclusion,

allotting him an honourable but modest seat in the second rank of talented writers.

The importance of the period lies in this very crystallization of Cowley's fate. It had till then fluctuated, now unduly favoured, now unduly opposed. It was settled at last by the careful work of the critics we have just reviewed. They were useful, not in advancing new theories, but in probing and developing to their logical conclusions those of the preceding age, thus solving the vexed problem of Cowley's relations with the neo-classical movement. They were useful above all in making a choice among his works. Addison and Steele had felt the charm of the *Essays*, Pope had celebrated his « moral lay », and « the language of his heart ». But these were merely hints, undeveloped perceptions. To the majority of readers, Cowley remained essentially a poet. And, even as a poet, his *Anacreontics* had hardly drawn attention. It has been the merit of the late eighteenth century to gain a full appreciation of the hidden sweets in his familiar verse and prose, and to disentangle from the mass of his works the gems by which he should live.

CHAPTER V

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY :

I. THE ROMANTIC AGE

When we reach the date 1800, the story of Cowley's reputation is to all appearances complete. The modern views concerning the poet and the man have but slightly varied since, the essentials of the eighteenth century appreciation of Cowley still remain, and Cowley stands now, as then, a writer in the second rank, whose main titles to our remembrance are his familiar verse and his prose. So many points had been settled for good by Dr. Johnson's apt argumentation that deviation from them was hardly thought of for a long time to come.

Later opinion, however, is far from unimportant. For though the critics of Cowley were content, for nearly three quarters of the nineteenth century, to tread again and again the ground already covered by their predecessors, yet, towards the seventies and eighties, a change in the outlook of his fame was discernible, leading to the renewed interest and more comprehensive view manifested by the first decades of the twentieth century.

The fortunes of Cowley's reputation during this period may well be illustrated from the succession of editions of his works, and the place devoted to him in selections. His fate may be read in the printers' books. A good deal of active interest was at first shown, no change appearing in the public mood, reprints and

large extracts being given in collections. It seemed as if the conditions of the eighteenth century were unchanged. John Aikin reissued Johnson's edition of Cowley's works in 1806¹. Hurd's selection came out again in 1809. *The Puritan and the Papist* was included in the second edition of the *Somers' Tracts* in 1811, and the prose-works were published separately in 1826².

Collections went on making room for his works, according to their respective scope. Alexander Chalmers gave once more Johnson's text, and in America Ezekiel Sanford offered his poetical works (*The Mistress* and the *Davideis* being, as in Hurd's book, omitted)³. His *Essays* and the *Discourse* figured in *The British Prose-writers*, and his complete works (the comedies excepted) in *The British Poets*⁴.

As to anthologies, the most important were *The Cabinet of Poetry*, where ten poems from the *Miscellanies*, the *Verses written upon several Occasions*, and the *Essays*, found their way, the *Specimens of the British Poets*, with twenty three poems, Thomas Campbell's *Specimens of the British Poets*, with eight (three being chosen from *The Mistress*), John Aikin's *Select Works of the British Poets*, containing no less than twenty two (four from *The Mistress*), and William Hazlitt's *Select Poets of Great Britain*, where Cowley figured with the *Anacreontics* and four other poems⁵.

At that stage we find a sudden break in the marks of attention still granted Cowley. After 1830, and far into the century, few traces of the old mood remained; for fifty years no edition of

1. *The Works of Abraham Cowley*, with a preface, biographical and critical, by Samuel Johnson, reedited with new biographical and critical matter by John Aikin... London, 1806.

2. *The Prose-works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper*... By Alexander Chalmers... London, 1810 (vol. VII). — *The Works of the British Poets*. With Lives of the authors, by Ezekiel Sanford. Philadelphia, 1819 (vol. VI).

4. *The British Prose-writers*. London, 1819-1821 (vol. III). — *The British Poets*... in one hundred vols. Chiswick, 1822 (vols. XIII, XIV, XV).

5. *The Cabinet of Poetry* was published in 1808 (vol. II); — the *Specimens* in 1809 (vol. I); — Campbell's *Specimens* in 1819; — Aikin's *Select Works* in 1820; — Hazlitt's in 1825.

Among less important anthologies may be mentioned Aikin's *Essays on Song-Writing*... a new ed. 1810 (*Honour*); and Robert Bland's *Selections from the Greek Anthology*, 1813, quoting the *Anacreontics*.

Cowley's works appeared, and a few unimportant extracts in anthologies preserved him but ill from total neglect⁶.

Then came a change, needless to say, for the good, in his fame. In 1881 his complete works were published by the zealous care of the Rev. A. B. Grosart, and there followed in 1905-1906, A. R. Waller's edition of his English writings. Numerous selections were meanwhile brought out, so that the end of the Victorian age differed essentially from its beginnings. It cannot be said that Cowley was the focus of attraction he had once been, but he occupied an eminent position among old neglected authors whose merits were discovered anew. His talent as a prose-writer was recalled in such editions of his *Essays* as Henry Morley's, J. Rawson Lumby's, H. C. Minchin's, W. H. D. Rouse's, J. M. Attenborough's, A. B. Gough's, A. A. Tilley's, while the poet was revived by A. C. Curtis, K. B. Locock, and John Sparrow⁷.

6. Cf. *The Book of Gems from the Poets and Artists of Great-Britain*. Ed. by S. C. Hall, London, 1836 (4 poems); — *The Helicon of Love*. A selection from the poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries... London, 1844 (*The Change*); — *Selections from the British Poets*... Dublin, 1851 (one poem); — *The Book of British Poesy Ancient and Modern*... By the Rev. George Gilfillan... London, 1851 (2 p.); — *The Sacred Poets of England and America for three centuries*. Ed. by R. W. Griswold. New-York, 1857 (2 p.); — *The Golden Treasury of the best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*. Selected... by F. T. Palgrave. Cambridge, 1861 (1 p.); — *A Household Book of British Poetry*, by R. C. Trench... London, 1863 (3 p.); — *A thousand and one gems of English Poetry*. Selected... by C. Mackay. London, 1867 (7 p.); — *Lyra Elegantium*... ed. by F. Locker-Lampson. London, 1867 (2 p.); — *The King and Commons. Cavalier and Puritan Song*. Selected... by H. Morley. London, 1868 (2 p.); — *Humorous Poems*... Selected... by W. M. Rossetti. London, 1873 (1 p.).

The most important anthology, as regarding Cowley, was that of G. Gilfillan: *Specimens, with Memoirs of the less-known British Poets*. Edinburgh, 1860. Eleven poems or fragments were included. But the title is clear enough: Cowley only shone among the « less-known » poets.

7. *Essays*. By Abraham Cowley. With an introduction by H. Morley. London, 1886 (Cassell's National Library). — *Cowley's Prose-works*. With introduction and notes by J. Rawson Lumby. Cambridge, 1887. — *Several Discourses by way of Essays in verse and prose, by Abraham Cowley*. Ed. with an introduction and notes by H. C. Minchin. London, 1904. — *Cowley's Essays*. London, 1907 (Blackie's English Texts. Ed. by W. H. D. Rouse). — *Essays and Selected Verse of Abraham Cowley*. With an introduction by J. M. Attenborough (1915). — *Abraham Cowley. The Essays and other Prose-writings*. Ed. by A. B. Gough. Oxford, 1915. — *Cowley's Prose-works* (Lumby's ed. revised by A. A. Tilley). Cambridge, 1923.

Poems. Selected from the writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley. London, 1902 (A. C. Curtis). — *Poems of Abraham Cowley*. Selected and ed. by Katherine B. Locock. London, 1903. — *The Mistress. With other select Poems of Abraham Cowley*. Ed. by John Sparrow. London, 1926.

The revival was less marked in Anthologies, which continued as usual including the few verses that rank him in the public eye as a minor poet of his age. Yet T. H. Ward selected fourteen poems in his *English Poets*, Carl Holliday seven in his *Caroline Poets*, H. J. Massingham five in his *Treasury of Seventeenth Century Verse*, H. J. C. Grierson seven in his *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, and W. S. Braithwaite seventeen in his *Book of Restoration Verse*. Cowley was even given some space in *The Stuffed Owl, an Anthology of bad Verse*⁸.

These facts speak for themselves. They give ample evidence that the history of Cowley's reputation in the nineteenth century naturally falls into three periods. The first, which stretches over the first thirty years is formed, as it were, with the last links of the unbroken chain of interest which had tied so many readers to his books through all the preceding age. — The Victorian era,

8. *The English Poets. Selections...* ed. by T. H. Ward. London, 1880 (vol. II). — *The Cavalier Poets*. Ed. by Carl Holliday. London, 1911. — *A Treasury of Seventeenth Century English Verse. From the death of Shakespeare to the Restoration*. 1616-1660. Chosen and ed. by H. J. Massingham. London, 1919. — *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century. Donne to Butler*. Sel. and ed. by H. J. C. Grierson. Oxford, 1921. — W. S. Braithwaite. *A Book of Restoration Verse*. London, 1925. — *The Stuffed Owl. An Anthology of Bad Verse*. Sel. and ed. by D. B. Wyndham Lewis and Charles Lee. London, 1930.

Many other anthologies devoted some small space to Cowley. Cf. *Horace's Odes. Englished and imitated by various Hands*. Sel... by C. W. Cooper. London, 1880 (3 odes from Cowley). — *The Treasury of Sacred Song*. Sel... by F. T. Palgrave. Oxford, 1889 (one fragment). — *A Paradise of English Poetry*. Arranged by H. C. Beeching. London, 1893 (6 poems). — *English Prose. Selections...* ed. by H. Craik. London, 1894 (vol. II, 4 extracts). — *English Essays*. With an introduction by J. H. Lobban. London, 1896 (*Of Myself*). — *A Library of the World's best Literature, Ancient and Modern*, ed. by C. D. Warner. New-York, 1897 (vol. VII, 3 poems, *Of Myself, Epitaphium*). — *English Lyric Poetry*. 1500-1700. With an introduction by F. I. Carpenter. London, 1897 (1 p.). — *English Lyrics. Chaucer to Poe*. Selected... by W. E. Henley. London, 1897 (1 p.). — *English Lyrics from Spenser to Milton...* by John Dennis. London, 1898 (6 p.). — *British Anthologies...* 10 vols., 1899-1901. Vol. V. *The Jonson Anthology* (3 p.); vol. VI. *The Milton Anthology* (4 p.). — *A Book of Seventeenth Century Lyrics*. ed. by F. E. Schelling. Boston, 1899 (5 p.). — *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. Chosen... by A. Quiller-Couch. Oxford, 1900 (5 p.). — *Seventeenth Century Lyrics*. Ed. by G. Saintsbury. London, 1902 (2 p.). — *Elegies, Ancient and Modern...* by Mary Lloyd. London, 1903 (3 p.). — *English Verse. Specimens...* by R. M. Alden. New-York, 1904 (1 p.). — *A Book of English Love Poems*. Ed. by E. Hutton. London, 1905 (1 p.). — *Illustrations of English Literature : from Herrick to Dryden*. ed. by G. B. Sellon. London, 1907 (2 poems, 2 essays). — *Sir William Temple upon the Gardens of Epicurus, with other Seventeenth Century Garden Essays*. With an introduction by A. F. Sieveking. London, 1908 (the essay *The Garden*).

from 1830 till about 1880, exhibited an utter contempt for a poet so intellectually complex and « metaphysical » as Cowley. This was indeed the dark hour for him. — With the awakening of the Victorian mind to new perplexities, Cowley emerged again from the darkness, and regained readers enough to warrant many partial reprints of his works. Unsuspected correspondences were felt between his soul and the modern soul, his art and our modern art. His intellectual struggles won sympathetic listeners, and he now enjoys, though somewhat obscured by his greater master, Donne, an aftermath of fame.

I

Towards 1800 Cowley's verse was still alive. The list of reprints, either detached or collected with other works, bears witness to the existence of a still considerable circle of readers. His influence, too, though much reduced, continued to be actively felt. When Erasmus Darwin, for instance, composed his *Botanic Garden* in 1806, he obviously remembered the *Books of Plants*, and J. F. Pennie bore the *Davideis* in mind when writing his *Royal Minstrel*, in 1817. Did he not choose as the motto to his epic this sentence taken out of the 1656 preface :

All the books of the Bible are either admirable and exalted pieces of poetry, or are the best materials in the world for it ?⁹.

Curious readers kept his memory alive, and familiarly alluded to his works. Isaac Disraeli, enquiring into the *Quarrels and Calamities of Authors*, and eager to detect *Curiosities of Literature*, mentioned him several times. He studied his melancholy and its sources, he reflected on the origin of his poetical career, the sincerity of his love for solitude, his friendship for William Hervey¹⁰. Edgeworth, recalling Spenser's influence on Cowley in

9. *The Poetical Works of Erasmus Darwin, containing the Botanic Garden...* London, 1806. *The Royal Minstrel; or, The Witcheries of Endor, an Epic Poem* in eleven books. By J. F. Pennie. Dorchester, 1817.

10. *Calamities of Authors* (1st ed. 1812, p. 35-42); *Quarrels of Authors* (1st ed. 1814, II, p. 57); *Curiosities of Literature* (1st ed. 1791, p. 85); *The Literary Character...* (1st ed. 1818, 4th ed. p. 248). Cf. also *The Literary Character* (pp. 177, 227); *Curiosities of Literature* (I, p. 85; II, p. 55).

his *Essays on Professional Education*, gave it the same importance as Johnson in the *Life* ¹¹. Francis Horner, when twenty four years of age, fell in love with the *Essays*, and thought Cowley's fame in this quarter fully deserved ¹². Sir Egerton Brydges keenly felt their charm too. Commenting upon Evelyn's paper : *Publick Employment prefer'd to Solitude*, he declared he had no intention of taking up the cause of solitude,

... more especially as the English language affords Essays on the subject, which in point of simple elegance of style, of sincerity of opinion, and force of sentiment and imagery have never yet been equalled. It is needless perhaps to add that the prose Discourses of Cowley are alluded to. What a compliment to the Muses, that the best poets have also been the best writers of prose ! Witness Cowley, Dryden, Addison, and Cowper !... ¹³.

William Davis, a self-styled « bibliomaniac », held in 1825 that admiration for Cowley was far from exceptional :

... However unfashionable Cowley may have become from the harshness and conceit of some of his compositions, there are still many who think with Dr. Blair, that Cowley's Anacreontic odes are by far the happiest of his efforts... ¹⁴.

Such periodicals as *The Quarterly* alluded to him again and again. Now the author of an article on *British Georgics* quoted some lines from his *Plantarum*, and incidentally praised his Latin style; now a borrowing by Crabbe from Cowley was noticed. Cowper was commended for some verses in which « he exhibits a copiousness of thought and expression worthy of Dryden or Cowley »; and of a poem by J. Clare : *What is Life ?*, it was said that some lines « have a terseness of expression and a nervous freedom of versification not unworthy of Drummond or of Cowley ». W. Hayley had been made « King of the bards of Britain, by grace of the public » : « for such he was... as incontestably as

11. *Essays on Professional Education*, ch. II (London, 1809). The theory was attacked in *The Quarterly Review* for October 1811 (VI, p. 168).

12. *Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner*... ed. by his brother. London, 1842 (I, p. 197).

13. *Censura Literaria*... by Sir Egerton Brydges (The second ed. London, 1815, vol. VI, p. 355). Brydges further quoted a whole page from the essay *Of Solitude* (p. 359), and part of the poem *The Garden* (p. 364).

14. *A Second Journey round the Library of a bibliomaniac*... by William Davis. London, 1825, p. 80.

Ben Jonson, and Cowley, and Pope had been before him ». Cowley's *Complaint* was recalled and quoted from, his latin style was held up as an instance of excellent latinity¹⁵. Many more allusions might be collected¹⁶: to the learned contributors of the *Quarterly*, Cowley was a familiar author, ever ready to be quoted, or used as a means for apt comparisons.

Still more scholarly were the allusions to be found in *The Classical Journal*: passages from the *Plantarum* and the *David-eidos* were adduced to prove a point of Latin prosody; Pope's debt to Cowley was pointed out, and Cowley's neglect as well; the lines on Bacon were quoted; an inaccurate quotation from Claudian was detected¹⁷. *The London Magazine* indicated that Young had borrowed from the *Davideis* in his *Night Thoughts*. Surprise was expressed in *Blackwood's Magazine* at Milton's preferring Cowley to Dryden; one of his translations from Horace was compared with those of Francis, Boscawen, and Milton, the palm being given to Milton's¹⁸.

It would be useless to deny, in consideration of these facts, that Cowley was still enjoyed, and often resorted to in the way of parallel, comparison, or quotation. Yet he was, as evidently, falling ever more into the hands of a few. He was becoming a recondite author, beyond the reach, out of the sphere of interest, of the public. Antiquaries, curious seekers prying into the recesses of the past, possessed of extensive learning, were his faithful, and almost his only support.

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Meanwhile critics dealt with him as their predecessors had

15. *The Quarterly Review*. London. Cf. vol. III, p. 456 (May 1810); IV, p. 294 (November 1810); XVI, p. 119 (October 1816); XXIII, p. 169 (May 1820); XXXI, p. 289 (March 1825); XXXIV, p. 367 (September 1826); XXXIX, p. 269 (April 1829).

16. For instance: allusions to him are to be found in vol. VIII, p. 97; IX, p. 55; XII, p. 82; XIX, p. 26; XXII, p. 230... As to quotations, cf. VI, p. 99; XVI, p. 515; XVII, p. 63; XXXV, p. 184...

17. *The Classical Journal*. London. Cf. vol. I, p. 292 (1810); XIII, p. 168 (1816); XVI, p. 300 (1817); XVIII, p. 232 (1818).

18. *The London Magazine*, May 1828 (p. 288); *Blackwood's Magazine*, September 1821 (X, p. 183), and May 1823 (XIII, p. 545).

done during the last years of the eighteenth century, through notices in biographical collections, or preceding selections from his works, Johnson's influence being dominant.

John Aikin commented upon metaphysical poetry after the Doctor. He ranked Cowley's poems « almost exclusively under the class of the ingenious ». Nothing in them « appeals exclusively to the unchangeable principles of human nature », for they were modelled upon « local and temporary manners of thinking ». As a metaphysical poet, however, he deserved to rank at the head of the group : « it seems impossible for a human fancy to surpass that of Cowley in the variety, brilliancy, and novelty of his conceptions ». Unfortunately, « this fertility precluded selection; and though he has more elegance and less coarseness than Donne, he frequently sinks to familiarity or deviates into grotesque... ». In his review of Cowley's works, he agreed with the orthodox views, setting above all his *Miscellanies*, his *Anacreontics*, and his *Verses written upon several Occasions*, among which he preferred the hymn *To Light*. He found *The Mistress* « full of wit, without a spark of feeling », the *Pindaric odes*, « feeble and extravagant », the *Dauides* nothing but a juvenile performance with some pleasing passages. The prose-works exhibited « a natural, easy, placid and equable writer : full of thought, but without stiffness or affectation ». Aikin enjoyed the humour of the *Cutter of Coleman Street*, and the ease of his *Latin Books of Plants*. On the whole, he reached the conclusion that Cowley, though not a poet of the first order, yet stood « almost unrivalled as a wit »¹⁹.

The notice in *The Cabinet of Poetry* also bore traces of the influence Johnson's *Life* exerted :

His works are too metaphysical in general, and perhaps too quaint... His amatory effusions are evidently drawn from the head rather than from the heart...

His *Plantarum* abounds in « ingenious incongruities ». His smal-

19. *General Biography*... Composed by John Aikin, the Rev. Thomas Morgan Mr. Nicholson, and others... London, 1802 (III, p. 188-191). When he made a choice among Cowley's works for his *Select Works of the British Poets*, in 1820, he admitted that Cowley had a right to « a considerable rank among the British poets... As a prose-writer, particularly in the department of Essays, there are few who can compare with him in elegant simplicity ».

ler poems are « remarkable » for their « splendid imagery... harmonious numbers... sterling sentiments... » ²⁰.

Ezekiel Sanford went further than most critics when he expressed his liking for Cowley as a metaphysical poet, calling him « one of the few writers, who could reconcile us to the absurdities of which the system is so necessarily prolific ». Clothed as his conceits are « by a rich profusion of learning », they charm through their novelty ²¹.

But the criticism of his metaphysical talent which was pronounced in the course of an article in *Blackwood's Magazine*, more faithfully expressed the current opinion in those years. Cowley was, to the author, the « prince » of metaphysical poets, — metaphysical meaning unnatural — :

He pushes his thoughts, whether metaphors, antitheses, or similes, frequently too far, and, what is worse, for the most part uses them indiscriminately and without any apparent consideration, whether or not their general tone is adapted to that of the subject he is treating... He crowds into his verse every point of every kind which his subject affords, as if all of equal propriety and value... Although a thought have the coldness of frost-work itself, he cares not, so it possesses also the crystalline sparkle; and though in the banquet he sets before us we meet with much real fruit, we fully as often have our teeth set on edge by a cheat in stone, or an imitation in ice ²².

Thomas Campbell did not think otherwise. He fully acknowledged the value of his prose :

Had Cowley written nothing but his prose, it would have stamped him a man of genius and an improver of our language.

As to his poetry, he found it marred by negligent selection :

... He teems, in many places, with the imagery, the feeling, the grace and the gaiety of a poet. Nothing but a severer judgment was wanting to collect the scattered lights of his fancy. His unnatural flights arose less from affectation than self-deception. He cherished false thoughts...

20. *The Cabinet of Poetry, containing the best entire pieces to be found in the works of the British poets...* London, 1808 (vol. II, p. 2).

21. *The Works of the British Poets. With Lives of the Authors*, by Ezekiel Sanford. Philadelphia, 1819 (VI, p. 7).

22. *Blackwood's Magazine*. January 1820 (VI, p. 368-9). The article dealt with « the progressive Change of Poetical Style ».

not from insensibility to the difference between truth and falsehood, but by being too indolent to examine the difference ²³.

The Mistress was severely censured on account of its coldness in a collection entitled *The Loves of the Poets*, and Cowley was thought to be rightly forgotten, in spite of his « elaborate wit », and « brilliant, uncommon thoughts » ²⁴.

The *Pindarics* were still reverently praised in an article on the *Odes* of Pindar published in *The Quarterly* :

... The real cause of the failure of our early English Pindar, is to be found in the absurdity and bad taste of their language... But Cowley... whose very errors must not be spoken of without respect, in spite of the manifold corruptions of his style and the wretched ornaments with which he loaded the simple majesty of his original, could yet, by the mere force of genius, joined to the power of seizing and embodying in another language the vivid ideas of Pindar, electrify, with two short specimens, the whole mass of English readers, and produce a lasting enthusiasm for even the abuse of lyric poetry... ²⁵.

William Gifford, on the other hand, condemned them utterly, in comparison with Ben Jonson's ode to Sir Henry Morison, harping upon the theme : « Cowley mistook the very nature of Pindar's poetry », and denying him lyrical genius of any kind ²⁶.

His Latin poems were specially selected for praise by Sir Egerton Brydges, who defended them against Thomas Warton, and set them, as Johnson had done, above Milton's ²⁷. And Robert Bland, including seven of Cowley's *Anacreontics* in his *Collections*

23. *Specimens of the British Poets*; with biographical and critical notices, and an Essay on English Poetry. By Thomas Campbell. A new edition. London, 1841. Preface, p. 79.

24. *The Loves of the Poets*. By the author of *The Diary of an Ennuyée*. London, 1829.

25. *The Quarterly*. May 1811 (vol. V, p. 444-446). In the same volume (Feb. 1811, p. 44), an account of Southey's *Curse of Kehama* drew attention to the possibilities of the genre as originated by Cowley.

26. *The Works of Ben Jonson*. In nine vols. With notes, critical and explanatory, and a biographical Memoir. By William Gifford, Esq. London, 1816 (vol. IX, p. 7, 8).

27. *Censura Literaria...*, vol. VII, p. 291-300 : On the Latin poems of Cowley. Johnson's hard censure on *Naufragium Joculare* was echoed in an article of the *Retrospective Review* on the Latin plays acted before the University of Cambridge (vol. XII, p. 39-41).

from the Greek Anthology, paid homage to their « many transcendental beauties »²⁸.

There is truly little difference between these criticisms and those we met with in the course of the preceding period²⁹. A mixture of reverence and regret is almost everywhere the keynote : reverence at the talent of Cowley, regret that it was so spoiled by the metaphysical vogue. As to the judgments passed on the various parts of Cowley's works, they faithfully reproduce the verdict pronounced by such men as Hurd and Johnson, setting his prose above his poetry, and, among the latter, preferring the *Anacreontics* and the smaller poems.

The general opinion of the time is embodied in a long article devoted to Cowley — the only one of the period —, in the *Retrospective Review*, though it seems to announce something of the hard, cold, unfeeling tone of Victorian criticism. The author found in the poems (a rather novel discovery !) « a reckless gaiety, a perpetual sport of fancy, without the slightest admixture of pathos, hardly of tenderness ». Like Johnson, he deplored that the language of the age was « gross and vulgar » :

... To write like a gentleman then was a very different thing from what is now : delicacy, and refinement, and simplicity, were alike abjur'd; and the perfection of good writing was to express out-of-the-way thoughts in mean and trivial language. The Castalia of the poets of that class was but a muddy pool, and Cowley, unfortunately for his fame, drank deeply of it...

28. *Collections from the Greek Anthology*. By the late Rev. Robert Bland, and others. A new edition... London, 1833, p. 42.

This praise of Cowley was approved and still enlarged in a review of the book in *The Quarterly* for October 1813 (vol. X, p. 142).

29. The place still given Cowley abroad is well shown by such a notice as that of the *Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne* (Paris, 1813), where he is called « célèbre poète anglais » (though towards the end it is confessed that he is little read), and given this character : « Toutes les poésies de Cowley se distinguent par l'originalité de la pensée, l'indépendance de l'esprit, une manière d'être et de sentir toute à lui, toujours noble, morale et philosophique, et assurée de cette vie qu'on ne donne qu'à l'expression de ses propres sentiments... Il a peu de sensibilité, s'élève rarement au sublime, même dans ses Odes Pindariques, où l'on trouve quelques pensées fortes, mais pas assez d'enthousiasme ni d'harmonie... L'esprit est le mérite qu'il possédait éminemment, et dont il abuse quelquefois... »

When he forgot to write « like a gentleman », and did it simply like a man, he could compose the exuberant *Chronicle*, *The Inconstant*, one of the very few acceptable poems in *The Mistress*, or the *Elegy on William Hervey*. As to the *Daideis*, it was decidedly bad, and the *Pindaric odes*, though « much commended and a little blamed » were most repulsive, for Cowley only took from Pindar's odes « what is low, vulgar, and trivial ». His translations, on the other hand, were quite good, and the serious parts of the *Cutter of Coleman Street* were a « very successful imitation of the manner of our elder dramatists, and show that Cowley, when he chose, could modulate his verses to rhythm »³⁰.

This article logically continued the evolution of Cowley's reputation. Well-known and honoured by cultivated men though he still was, he survived only through a small portion of his works, and even so it was thought that a place among second rate authors was no more than he deserved. But these estimates represent the less interesting aspect of the period. The question naturally arises as to the new developments in Cowley's reputation which might spring from the Romantic movement. What would be the attitude of such men as Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Lamb, towards our poet? How far would they welcome him, how could their inspirations be reconciled with his? And, at any rate, what aspects of his works would they most esteem?

II

It has already been seen how, among the critical opinions of the later eighteenth century, a new element had crept in, obviously the token of a deep change in thought. Besides his virtue and his wit — the two main centres of attraction Cowley had always possessed —, some writers discovered his sensibility, his melancholy, a certain spirit of enthusiasm, qualities opposed to the pure cold reason of the neo-classical mood, and therefore making for romanticism. Besides Hurd's insistence on « the tender sensibility of his mind » and « the shade of melancholy »

30. *The Retrospective Review*. London, 1827 (vol. XV, p. 351-386).

which softened his « clear sparkling fancy », his singling out *The Complaint* for praise because of its « air of melancholy », or his preference for the *Essays* on sentimental grounds, it may be remembered that Hume confessed himself pleased with the *Essays*, not merely on account of their « honesty and goodness », but also because of « their spleen and melancholy ». And even V. Knox esteemed that « the tenderness of love and the soft language of complaint » were adapted to his genius.

Thus Cowley had begun to be praised, shyly, tentatively, for his « romantic » qualities³¹. Was he not about to be admired for those very reasons by the romantic writers themselves? They all knew him: Wordsworth and Coleridge, Southey, Lamb, Landor, de Quincey, Scott, Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, all gave sure signs that they had read his works; it may not be uninteresting to learn to what extent, and with what ultimate results.

Wordsworth has declared that he owned the seventh edition of his works, and had read it through. But, his attitude was rather patronizing. He called him « that able writer and amiable man », and, from a technical point of view, thought him « very valuable to a collector of English sound sense ». But he considered that the admiration which the metaphysical poets had aroused was « extravagant », and expressed his surprise at finding Johnson's *Lives* open with that of Cowley. He also found it strange that a father could advise his son, some time between 1688 and 1700, to read with special care Rochester, Denham and Cowley³². Obviously, Cowley was to him a very minor poet, whose main interest lay in his prosodic experiments, and whose talent or thought possessed no power of attraction over him.

Coleridge, on the contrary, perceived Cowley's merit better, and devoted more attention to him. Was he not himself one of his distant disciples, since he wrote irregular odes in the manner of Cowley's Pindarics, as well as regular ones? ³³ — though, in

31. Cf. the article, already referred to, of A. H. Nethercot, in *Studies in Philology*, vol. XXII, p. 81, sq...

32. Cf. the *Essay supplementary to the Preface*, published in 1815 as an addition to the first preface (*Poems...* by William Wordsworth..., 1815, p. 354, 356, 366). The estimate of Cowley as a « sound-sense » poet is to be found in the *Conversations and Reminiscences recorded by the (now) Bishop of Lincoln* (Grosart's edition of the *Works of Wordsworth*, III, p. 465).

33. Cf. *Monody on the death of Chatterton; France, an Ode; Dejection, an Ode; An Ode to the rain...*

truth, he seemed to find his loose paraphrases of Pindar most reprehensible, if we judge from the anecdote he tells, when, having read the opening stanzas of the *Second Olympique ode* before a company of learned ladies, one of these exclaimed, « with the full assent of the rest », « that if the original were madder than this, it must be incurably mad »³⁴. But he appreciated the qualities of the old poets, just as he acutely detected their defects, and aptly compared their shortcomings with the false excellencies of the moderns :

... In the former, from Donne to Cowley, we find the most fantastic out of the way thoughts, but in the most pure and genuine mother English; in the latter, the most obvious thoughts, in language the most fantastic and arbitrary...³⁵.

As a poet, he set Crashaw above Cowley³⁶, and, like Warton, strongly objected to the Latin poems on account of the metaphysical conceits Cowley wanted to express through them :

... He completely barbarizes his latinity, and even his metres, by the heterogeneous nature of his thoughts...³⁷.

Johnson's preference of them to those of Milton, he could not understand. But he loved Cowley's prose style, which, he said, was characteristic of him as « a first-rate gentleman », and which he set on a level with Dryden's. To him, the seventeenth century prose-writers were « the great patterns or integers of English style » :

... For mere ease and grace, is Cowley inferior to Addison, being as he is so much more thoughtful and full of fancy ? Cowley, with the omission of a quaintness here and there, is probably the best model of style for modern imitation in general...³⁸.

34. *Biographia Literaria*. By S. T. Coleridge... Ed. by J. Shawcross. Oxford, 1907 (II, p. 66).

35. *Ibid.* (I, p. 15).

36. *The Table-Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*... Oxford ed. 1917 (p. 441 : among *T. Allsop's Recollections*, January 1821).

37. *Table-Talk* (p. 56). May 8, 1824; and (p. 72), 12 July 1827.

38. *Miscellanies, Aesthetic and Literary*; to which is added the *Theory of Life*, by S. T. Coleridge. Collected and arranged by T. Ashe... London, 1885 (p. 181). Yet, he objected to the mixture of prose and verse in the *Discourse*, for « there is something unpleasant in the being thus obliged to alternate states of feeling so dissimilar » (*Biographia Lit.*, II, p. 97).

Though proving on the part of Coleridge an extensive knowledge of Cowley's works, these summary judgments or allusions do not give any signs of real interest and sympathy. To Coleridge, a man of multifarious reading, Cowley deserved nothing more than such casual remarks. He never dwelt upon him at any length.

This was not the case with Charles Lamb. He was most familiar with most seventeenth century writers, and the names of Ben Jonson, Isaac Walton, Milton, Dryden, Evelyn, Marvell, Burton, Davenant, Cleveland, Butler, Randolph, to mention but a few, recur again and again under his pen. It is not surprising therefore to meet with Cowley's name too. And Cowley was one of those, with Burton and Browne, who perhaps won his warmest sympathy. The poet had been, we know, one of the favourite authors of his youth : if he had seen the workmen pulling down the house where he had dwelt as a child, he tells us : « I should have cried out to them to spare a plank at least out of the cheerful storeroom, in whose hot window-seat I used to sit and read Cowley »³⁹.

As early as 1797 he let us know the reason as well as the depth of his delight in Cowley, writing to Coleridge :

... In all our comparisons of taste, I do not know whether I have ever heard your opinion of a poet, very dear to me, the now out of fashion Cowley. Favour me with your judgment of him, and tell me if his prose essays, in particular, as well as no inconsiderable part of his verse, be not delicious. I prefer the graceful rambling of his essays, even to the courtly elegance and ease of Addison; abstracting from this, the latter's exquisite humour⁴⁰.

Even as a poet, Cowley found favour with him :

... Shall I be thought fantastical if I confess that the names of some of our poets sound sweeter, and have a finer relish to the ear — to mine at least — than that of Milton or Shakespeare?... The sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention, are Kit Marlowe, Drayton, Drummond of Hawthornden, and Cowley...⁴¹.

39. *Last Essays of Elia*. Ed. by A. Hamilton Thompson. Cambridge, 1913 (*Blakesmoor in Hampshire*, p. 7).

40. Letter to Coleridge, January, 10, 1797 (*Letters of Charles Lamb*, ed... by Alfred Ainger. London, 1904, I, p. 66).

41. *Detached Thoughts on Books and reading* (*Last Essays*, p. 40). He specially loved the elegy on the death of William Hervey : cf. letter to Coleridge, June 1796 (*Letters...* I, p. 6).

He defended the metaphysical poets, Cowley and Donne being mentioned by name, from the charge of coldness and artificiality:

... We are apt to indemnify ourselves for some characteristic excellence we are kind enough to concede to a great author by denying everything else. Thus Donne and Cowley, by happening to possess more wit, and faculty of illustration, than other men, are supposed to have been incapable of nature or feeling : they are usually opposed to such writers as Shenstone and Parnell; whereas, in the very thickest of their conceits, in the bewildering maze of tropes and figures, a warmth of soul and generous feeling shines through, the « sum » of which « forty thousand » of those natural poets, as they are called, « with all their quantity », could not make up ⁴².

Even the *Cutter of Coleman Street* received some praise at his hands :

... The Cutter has always appeared to me the link between the comedy of Fletcher and of Congreve. In the elegant passion of the love-scenes it approaches the former; and Puny... is the prototype of the half-witted wits, the Brisks and Dapperwits, of the latter... ⁴³.

Throughout the *Essays of Elia*, moreover, Lamb's delighted familiarity with Cowley was illustrated by various allusions : here he adapted a conceit taken from *The Complaint*, to a mock-heroic purpose ⁴⁴, or when writing to a distant correspondent recalled the celebrated Post-Angel. There he quoted two lines from *The Chronicle*, elsewhere again part of a stanza from the Hervey elegy, and his « superannuated man » recited (in the first edition) some verses from *The Complaint*, which « mightily agreed with his constitution » ⁴⁵.

Such heartfelt sympathy, prompted no doubt by a feeling of mental kinship in the younger essayist, was not to be found in any other critic of the romantic group. Southey merely listed him with the metaphysical poets, looking upon him, indeed, as the

42. *Table-Talk, and fragments of Criticism...* ed. A. Ainger, 1885 (p. 358).

43. *Characters of Dramatic Writers* (In Percy Fitzgerald's ed. of *The Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb*. London, 1876, IV, p. 255).

44. *Christ's Hospital (Essays of Elia*, I, p. 30).

45. *Distant Correspondents* (I, p. 168); *On some of the old Actors* (I, p. 319); *Sanity of true Genius* (II, p. 61); *The Superannuated man* (II, p. 277).

highest and last of them ⁴⁶, and deploring that he had « squandered upon this fashion powers which might have won for him the lasting fame to which he aspired » ⁴⁷.

Landor mentioned him only to disparage his Latin poems, saying : « There is no Latin verse of Cowley worth preservation », and to tell an extravagant story about the poet being summarily and indecorously dealt with by Sir Humphry Hardcastle. Yet he acknowledged, through Johnson's words, the services he had rendered to the English language ⁴⁸. De Quincey was content to hint that Donne and Cowley might be called rather « rhetorical » than « metaphysical » poets ⁴⁹. Byron copied down in his *Log-book* the *Epitaphium vivi Auctoris*, on the 27th of February 1821, but the only thing we learn about his feelings is his deep contempt for the *Davideis* ⁵⁰. As to Sir Walter Scott, he seemingly modelled the daughters of Magnus Troil in *The Pirate* after the pattern given by Cowley in the portraits of Michol and Merab ⁵¹.

Leigh Hunt, it is true, was decidedly favourable, and his attitude reminds us of Lamb's affectionate regard. The character he gave the poet in his review of *The Town* was written in a spirit of keen appreciation. In Fleet Street, said he...

... was born a man of genius and benevolence, who would not have hurt a fly : Abraham Cowley... one of the kindest, wisest and truest gentlemen that ever graced humanity...

His poetry he looked upon as :

46. *Specimens of the later English Poets*. With preliminary notices. By Robert Southey. London, 1807 (I, p. xxiv). Indeed, when he thought of going over to America, he was reminded of Cowley's similar intention (Cf. E. Dowden. *Southey*, p. 33).

47. *The Life and Works of William Cowper*. By Robert Southey. London, 1854 (I, p. 303-4).

48. *Imaginary Conversations by Walter Savage Landor*. Ed. C. G. Crump. London, 1891 (vol. IV, p. 291, III, p. 260).

49. *Rhetoric (The Collected Works of T. de Quincey...)* By David Masson. Edinburgh, 1890. Vol. X, p. 101).

50. He ranked Cowley's poem among the « dull of past and present days » (note to a poem : *Hints from Horace. Poems*. ed. Hartley Coleridge, 1898. I, p. 403. *The Epitaphium* is to be found in vol. V, p. 210). Yet he knew his works well, since he recalled on his death-bed Cowley's comparison of life to an isthmus betwixt two Eternities (E. Rodocanachi. *Byron*, Paris, 1924, p. 219).

51. Cf. Grosart. *Memorial-Introduction to Cowley's Works*. 1881, p. LXVI.

... the flower of what was in him; and it is at least so far good poetry, as it is the quintessence of amiable and deep reflection... His prose is admirable, and his character of Cromwell a masterpiece of honest enmity... ⁵².

The parallel he drew between James Thomson and Cowley again expressed his sympathy. Cowley he called « an excellent man, and a better poet than he has latterly been thought ». Though faulty in style, he deserved to be called « a true poet in himself ». Cowley's faults were his « conceits », Thomson's his « turgidity ». But :

Neither of the faults touched the heart of the writers, while both originated in the very humility and simplicity of the men, and in that disposition to admire others... They fancied their own natural language not great enough for their subjects; and Cowley in the wit he found in fashion, and Thomson in the Latin classics... thought he had found a style... which would ensure their fame... ⁵³.

It seems as if Leigh Hunt had formed in his mind an ideal image of Cowley, and felt for him a sort of visionary sympathy which caused him to view in the light of slight defects faults which he might otherwise have found unacceptable.

Hazlitt, on the other hand, judged him with the cold light of his reason, and evidently felt out of touch with the poet. He knew him well, as several allusions scattered through his works sufficiently prove ⁵⁴. But Cowley came under the same ban with the other metaphysical poets, sharing their artificiality, merely intent upon avoiding the language of every day and spontaneous impression, « by being intricate, far-fetched, and improbable ». Hazlitt condemned them at some length :

... Whenever, by any violence done to their ideas, they could make out abstract likeness or possible ground of comparison, they forced the image, whether learned or vulgar, into the service of the Muses... They brought ideas together, not the most but the least like...

52. *The Town. Its memorable Characters and Events*. By Leigh Hunt (A new ed. London, 1859, p. 116).

53. *Men, Women and Books*. A Selection of Sketches, Essays, and critical Memoirs from his uncollected prose-writings. By Leigh Hunt (A new ed. 1891. *Cowley and Thomson*, p. 223-228).

54. *The collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover... London, 1902. Cf. allusions to *The Chronicle* (I, p. 133; VI, p. 236; XII, p. 124) ; a quotation from the *Discourse* (VI, p. 110...).

Their poems were neither grave nor gay, but

... an ill-assorted, unprofitable union of the two, applying to serious subjects that quaint and partial style of allusion which fits only what is light and ludicrous, and building the most laboured conclusions on the most fantastical and slender premises... ⁵⁵.

So Hazlitt went on, attempting, for the first time since Johnson, a definition of metaphysical poetry, distinguishing it in turn from the poetry of the imagination, the poetry of the passions, and even intellectual poetry, for to his mind it consisted « strictly not of ideas, but of definitions... and was the logic of the schools... decked out in a robe of glittering conceits, and clogged with the halting shackles of verse... ». Not that he was blind to their genius. What he deplored was « not want of power but waste of it » :

... It has been well observed — he wrote in an article of the *Edinburgh Review* — that notwithstanding the adventitious ornaments with which their style is encumbered, there is more truth and feeling in Cowley and Sir Philip Sidney, than in a host of insipid and merely natural writers... ⁵⁶.

And Cowley, who had carried the metaphysical style to its « most dazzling and fantastic excess », wasted his powers still more deplorably than his erring brothers :

... In Cowley there is an inexhaustible fund of sense and ingenuity, buried in inextricable conceits, and entangled in the cobwebs of the schools. He was a great man, not a great poet ⁵⁷.

This last distinction, so often made since Dryden's time, bears witness to the unavoidable truth critics of every persuasion were bound to acknowledge. However faulty they deemed his poems, they had to bow before a true nobility of mind which glowed through his works, and the powerful intellect that had given them life. But, on the other hand, however much they revered his character, his faults would thrust themselves upon their attention, and they were bound to unveil, now pitifully, now with a kind of bitter satisfaction, all his shortcomings, and their causes.

55. *Lectures on the English Comic Writers. Lecture III. On Cowley, Butler, Suckling, Etherege, etc...* (vol. VIII, p. 49, sq...).

56. Article on Sismondi's *Literature of the South* (*Works*, X, p. 64).

57. *Lectures on the English Poets. On Dryden and Pope* (*Works*, V, p. 84).

As for Hazlitt, he thought highly of his intellectual powers, but was deeply hostile to his artificiality, to the sort of insincerity with his own self, the lack of courage by which Cowley, as a poet, refused to be himself, and sought for means of expression not his own. Thus he went as far as asserting that he had « more brilliancy of fancy and ingenuity of thought than Donne, with less pathos and sentiment »⁵⁸, and coupled him with Young « as the most brilliant instances of the separation of feeling from fancy, of men who were dazzled by the exuberance of their own thoughts, and whose genius was sacrificed to their want of taste »⁵⁹. His opinion was summed up in this sentence :

... Cowley is a writer of great sense, ingenuity, and learning; but as a poet his fancy is quaint, far-fetched, and mechanical, and he has no other distinguishing merit whatever⁶⁰.

So that, while liking the *Anacreontics*, some of his *Odes* and of his occasional poems, he regretted that he had not written more prose and less poetry, « for he was clearly a man of more reflection than imagination »⁶¹.

All these writers, with varying degrees of intimacy, knew Cowley. But their opinions, even when definitely expressed, do not add much to the story of Cowley's reputation. They detested Dryden and Pope, against whom their crusade was directed, but the metaphysical school of poets though more nearly related to their own free individualism, was also distasteful to them, as being secluded in an artificial world of its own, far from nature and truth. In fact, much sympathy could hardly be expected from them. They might have appreciated the fanciful play of the metaphysical poets upon ideas and images, had it not been so intensely

58. *Lectures on the English comic Writers* (vol. VIII, p. 57).

59. *Fugitive Writings* (*Works*, XI, p. 574).

60. *Lectures on the English Poets* (V, p. 372).

61. *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (VIII, p. 58-60). Strange to say, the hymn *To Light* roused his temper : « The conceits here are neither wit nor poetry; but a burlesque upon both made up of a singular metaphorical jargon, verbal generalities, and physical analogies... » He liked *The Complaint*, the translations scattered among the *Essays*, the odes upon Van Dyke, Brutus, the Royal Society, Hobbes, and of course *The Chronicle*. The comedies also found favour with him : he specially enjoyed the conversion of Tabitha by Cutter.

intellectual in its essence. Their hearts ruled over their minds, and while ready to welcome any sign of true sensibility in their Elizabethan forerunners, they felt wholly out of touch with the strange school of poets whose imagination delighted in subtle argumentation, and had replaced in their verse lyrical raptures by elaborate rhetoric. Their own thoughts were as dim and shadowy as those of Donne and Cowley were precise and packed with substance⁶². What they were looking for, harmonious music and the spontaneous outpourings of emotions, they could not find; and what they might have found they could not appreciate. They were, in fact, no nearer the metaphysical poets than they were to the neo-classicists.

It is not surprising, therefore, that, in their criticism of Cowley, they hardly differed from his eighteenth century judges; their likings and dislikes remained practically unchanged; they objected to metaphysical poetry, as such, and merely esteemed in Cowley what verse was not metaphysical, and his prose. It might be said, however, that some, like Coleridge or Lamb, manifested a tendency towards a keener appreciation of his originality, and even of his eccentricity, thus paving the way for a more catholic relish of his poetry, but to turn these slight indications into a full-fledged theory would be unduly stressing the point. In truth, they were most of all attracted by the personal touch of his familiar verse and prose, by the feeling of being admitted into his intimacy, or, as Pope and Hurd had said long ago, by « the language of his heart » and « the tender sensibility of his mind ». But the hints which the eighteenth century had thrown out to them remained practically undeveloped, and they left him much as they had found him. Lamb alone endeavoured to raise him from his depressed station, but his voice found no echo, and he truly seemed, in his apology of Cowley as a poet, to have taken up a lost cause.

62. The difference between the two attitudes may be clearly brought out by a comparison of Cowley's *Friendship in Absence*, with Coleridge's poem *Absence*.

CHAPTER VI

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

II. THE VICTORIAN AGE

The half-century that followed 1830 marks the lowest point ever reached by Cowley's reputation. The hold he had so long maintained upon the reading public was now a thing of the past. His appeal could no longer be heard. Those who had a taste for classical regularity and reason could read Dryden or Pope; those who longed for the delights of imagination and sensibility found a full satisfaction in the romantic poets and essayists. Only those who were eager for out of the way thoughts and phrases, for eccentric signs of originality, might want to take down his dusty volumes from their distant shelf, and how few they were in the Victorian Age !¹.

I

Not one edition of his works, not even a selection was called for during these fifty years. Cowley survived only in the extracts which editors of anthologies preserved. Only those who were professionally interested in literature continued to read and mention him : the writers and the critics.

1. Such was, for instance, a contributor of *Blackwood's Magazine* who collected the « legal illustrations » in Cowley's poetry (June 1837, vol. XLI, p. 791).

Macaulay several times alluded to him or quoted from his works. In his *History of England*, he praised him for raising his voice courageously « against the immorality which disgraced both letters and loyalty »; he spoke highly of his ode to the Royal Society :

Cowley, in lines weighty with thought and resplendent with wit, urged the chosen seed to take possession of the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey².

In one of his *Imaginary Dialogues*, he chose Cowley as his hero, taking him as a representative Royalist, against the representative Puritan, Milton³. He analysed his wit in an indirect fashion by comparing Horace Walpole's with it :

... His wit was, in its essential properties, of the same kind with that of Cowley and Donne : like theirs it consisted in an exquisite perception of analogy and points of contrast too subtle for common observation. Like them, Walpole perpetually startles us by the ease with which he yokes together ideas between which there would seem, at first sight, to be no connection. But he did not, like them, affect the gravity of a lecture, and draw his illustrations from the laboratory and from the schools...⁴.

Thus he showed his knowledge of Cowley's works... and also of Johnson's *Life* of Cowley. He challenged Johnson's preference of Cowley's Latin verse to that of Milton :

Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had little imagination : nor indeed do we think his classical diction comparable to that of Milton...⁵.

He enjoyed Addison's wit much more than that of Cowley :

No single ode of Cowley contains so many happy analogies as are crowded into the lines to Sir Godfrey Kneller⁶.

2. *The Complete Works of Lord Macaulay* (Albany edition). London, 1898 (vol. I, p. 419, 426).

3. *A Conversation between Mr. Abraham Cowley, and Mr. John Milton touching the great Civil War*. Set down by a gentleman of the Middle Temple. August 1824 (*The Miscellaneous writings of Lord Macaulay*. London, 1860, I, p. 101-124).

4. *Critical and Historical Essays* (Everyman's ed., I, p. 344).

5. *Essay on Milton* (Everyman's ed. I, p. 156).

6. *The Life and Writings of Addison* (II, p. 490).

Macaulay's attitude is representative of that which the « literati » would then adopt. Cowley was part and parcel of their literary baggage, and as such familiarly known; but this familiarity was no sure sign of admiration, and they only took a mild interest in him.

Some problems, however, proved specially alluring. For instance, an attempt was made in 1836 to provide the reading public with the correspondence Sprat had wilfully suppressed. In the *Frazer's Magazine* for April his private letters were announced to have been discovered and some were printed in that and the August number ⁷. A notice represented Cowley, once more, as misled by Donne, so that his prose might be called « the language of a sect ». Even the sect, however, was not without merit, and the author found him justified in joining the metaphysical group of poets :

... They were men of deep and extensive scholarship, trained in all the learning of the schools... With them poetry was, indeed, the blossom of all human knowledge, and the more rare and distant the tree, the more precious the fruit... ⁸.

When Miss Mitford wrote her *Recollections of a Literary Life*, she devoted several pages to Cowley, carefully setting apart the two men that coexisted in him, the courtier and the sage, the former being responsible for the poems, the latter, much superior, being the lovable author of the *Essays*. She could not refrain from calling Sprat « Goth and Vandal » for having deprived us of Cowley's letters; and she abundantly quoted from the prefaces, the *Essays*, the *Discourse*, while but a few poems were included : the *Chronicle* of course, and some *Anacreontics* ⁹.

Many writers did not even name him. Others only made a casual remark or two. Matthew Arnold merely related Dryden's saying that Cowley « could see nothing at all in Chaucer's poetry » ¹⁰. Clough mentioned his purchasing a volume of Cowley's

7. *The Frazer's Magazine for Town and Country*. April 1836 (vol. XIII), August (vol. XIV).

8. April number, p. 395, sq.. The forgery was exposed by the Rev. A. B. Grosart in *The Athaeneum*, 17 July 1897, p. 99.

9. *Recollections of a Literary Life* (1859 ed. p. 31-46).

10. *Essays in Criticism. Second Series*. London, 1889 (*The Study of Poetry*, p. 35).

and showed that he had read it, at least from a technical point of view :

I have bought a Cowley, rather a scrubby 18 mo, but the first edition after his death. I think Cowley has been Wordsworth's model in many of his rhythms, and some of his curious felicities ¹¹.

Some remembered the *Pindaric odes* only to condemn them. Thus Swinburne, after writing irregular Pindarics ¹², was converted to the regular ode after the Greek pattern, and wrote :

The title of ode may more properly and fairly be so extended as to cover all lyrical poems in stanzas or couplets than so strained as to include a lawless lyric of such irregular and uneven build as Coleridge only and hardly could make acceptable or admissible among more natural and lawful forms of poetry ¹³.

It is significant that Cowley's name was no longer linked with the notion of the irregular ode. His Pindaric reign had long been at an end. When writers mentioned his name, as J. R. Lowell did (a Pindaric poet himself : witness his *Commemoration Ode*), it was for such pitiless analyses as this one :

By beating out the substance of Pindar very thin, he contrived a kind of balloon which, tumid with gas, did certainly mount a little, *into* the clouds, if not above them, though sure to come suddenly down with a bump. His odes indeed are an alternation of upward jerks and concussions, and smack more of Chaplain than of the Theban.

Yet he found his prose « very agreeable, Montaigne and water, perhaps, but with some flavour of the Gascon wine left... », and he praised Cowley's anacreontic grace in *The Grasshopper*, which has « all the spontaneous merit of an original song » ¹⁴.

11. *Prose Remains of A. H. Clough*, With a selection from his letters, and a Memoir. London, 1888, p. 105 : Letter to the Rev. T. Burbidge (What is the edition Clough bought we cannot guess, since all editions of his English Works till the end of the century were folio volumes).

12. Cf. the *Ode to Mazzini*, *Echo*, *Hymn to the Night*, *To the Nightingale*...

13. *Dedicatory Epistle to the Poems* (1904 ed., p. xiv). He, by the way, set James Shirley «as infinitely above the Cowleys and the Clevelands... as a giant to pigmies...; for the strong uneven stride of his verse is no more like the mincing amble of Cowley's, than Wordsworth is like Moore... » (*Contemporaries of Shakespeare*. Edited by E. Gosse and T. J. Wise. London, 1919, p. 304).

14. *Literary Essays. Dryden (The Writings of James Russell Lowell*. Riverside edition, 1890. III, p. 127). And *Conversations on some of the old poets* by J. R. Lowell... Philadelphia, 1893 (p. 290).

Others, like Fitzgerald, recognized the intellectual power which lay at the bottom of metaphysical poetry.

But by far the most interesting account given during the period by a member of the craft is that of Mrs. Browning. In the *Book of the Poets* she fully delivered her opinion of Cowley. First, as to his place and personality :

The genius of the new school was its anomaly, even Abraham Cowley... He stands on the very vibratory soil of the transition, and stretches his faltering and protesting hands on either side to the old and to the new... He was a true poet, both by natural constitution and cultivation, but without the poet's heart.

The critic then acutely pointed out the distance between his *Odes* and those of Pindar : he was a Pindar writing by « métier », rather than by « verve », coldly maturing what the Greek poet conceived in a flash of enthusiasm. His great error, his crime, was, « with a conscious volition, quick yet calm, calm when quickest, to command from the ends of the universe the associations of material sciences and spiritual philosophies ». The *Dauides*, « our first epic in point of time », abounded in beautiful passages; the *Anacreontics* were models of their kind.

... His other poems contain profuse material, in image and reflection, for the accomplishment of three poets, each greater than himself.

On the whole, Mrs. Browning concluded...

His influence was for good rather than for evil, by inciting to a struggle backward, a delay in the revolutionary movement ¹⁵.

This account of Cowley can hardly be called representative. It should rather be called an exception. Mrs. Browning was attracted towards him in proportion as she felt repelled by the age in which

15. *Letters of Edward Fitzgerald*. London, 1894, II, p. 26 : Letter to Cowell, December 7. 1861.

16. *The Book of the Poets* (in *The Complete Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*... New-York, 1919, II, p. 300-303). It was first published serially in *The Athenaeum* (The article on Cowley, in August 1842). In a *Vision of the Poets*, she had poetically expressed her feeling of Cowley's unevenness :

..... Cowley there
Whose active fancy debonair
Drew straws like amber — foul to fair...

(*Works*, I, p. 162).

she lived, and perhaps she detected in Cowley's verse a faint echo of her own spiritual struggles, of her eager quest after self-knowledge and truth. Such broad-minded sympathy, making for a more comprehensive and true outlook, was beyond the reach of most readers and critics in that age. The poetry of Cowley went so much against the deeply-rooted principles of the early and mid-Victorians that anything like a fair estimate seemed from the first hopeless.

A rational, realistic period, eager only for practical achievements and the self-restraint of scientific methods, a period of « Philistines », satisfied in material and spiritual mediocrity, deaf to the appeals of beauty and disinterested art, could not well admire the lavish ingenuities of Cowley, his restless play upon abstractions, his ever-fanciful transposition of reality. Worshipers of common-sense and plain facts could but treat such idle vagaries with contempt. The representative critics, without making any deep alteration in the traditional view of Cowley, showed a kind of hardening against him, an obstinate refusal to consider those parts of his works which hurt their convictions, or their prejudices.

II

This school of criticism, which Saintsbury called « the anti-enthusiast school », is perhaps most faithfully embodied in Henry Hallam's appreciation of Cowley. He ruthlessly condemned metaphysical poetry, and all the metaphysical elements in Cowley. For the metaphysical poets « laboured after conceits, or novel turns of thought, usually false, and resting upon some equivocation of language, or exceedingly remote analogy ». Donne was defined « the most inharmonious of our versifiers »; and Crashaw:

... a man of some imagination and great piety, but whose softness of heart, united with feeble judgment, led him to admire and imitate whatever was most extravagant in the mystic writings of St. Theresa... It is difficult, in general, to find anything in Crashaw that bad taste has not deformed.

He thought highly of Cowley as a man, but, as a poet, he « perhaps has had a reputation more above his deserts than any

English poet ». Hallam was however bound to add : « and yet, some who wrote better than he, did not possess so fine a genius ». *The Mistress* was nothing but

a series of short amatory poems, in the Italian style of the Age, full of analogies that have no semblance of truth, except from the double sense of words, and thoughts that unite the coldness of subtlety with the hyperbolical extravagance of counterfeited passion.

The same faults might be detected in the *Pindaric odes* : « his sensibility and good sense, nor has any poet more, are choked by false taste », though « they contain, like all his poetry, from time to time, very beautiful lines »... He preferred of course the *Anacreontics*, which exhibit « a spirit and a raciness very unlike these frigid conceits », and was pleased with occasional poems such as the *Complaint* where « his disappointed hopes give a not unpleasing melancholy to several passages », the *Elegy on Mr. William Hervey*, displaying « some proofs of real sensibility and poetic grace », and the *Elegy on Mr. Crashaw*. Among the Latin poems, he singled out the *Epitaphium vivi Auctoris* as being equal to any one similar production of Milton's, and his prose-works naturally enough delighted him, the *Essays* ranking « among the earliest models of good writing », the *Discourse* exhibiting, save towards the end, « an ease and graceful choice of idiom, an unstudied harmony of periods, which has been perceived in very few writers of the two preceding reigns »¹⁷.

Fair though it is, and even generous in its praise, this criticism was held too severe in parts; thus Hallam's reviewer in the *Quarterly* asserted :

We fully agree with Mr. Hallam in his estimate of his (Cowley's) faults, yet we appreciate, we think, rather more favourably his beauties¹⁸.

A more unsparing judgment is to be found in an anonymous article, thirty five pages long, published in the *North British*

17. *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*. By Henry Hallam. London, 1839 (Vol. III, p. 491-495). For the last two points, cf. vol. IV, p. 446 and 531.

18. *The Quarterly Review*, March 1840 (vol. LXV, p. 364). The ode *To the Royal Society* was specially praised.

Review for February 1847. The writer, while acknowledging Cowley's unimpeachable morality, found fault with *The Mistress*, and called *The Chronicle* « a poematic effort entirely in the loose and reprehensible style of the period ». In the *Pindaric odes*, and the *Davideis*, he found nothing to commend. The only poems which he grudgingly approved of were his elegies (he compared the elegy on the death of John Littleton to *Lycidas* — a bold assertion !) and the *Plantarum* which were « destitute neither of elegance nor invention ». His opinion was best summarized by his calling Cowley's poetry « a mass of puerile and trashy verse »¹⁹. Such immoderate censure, as uncritical as were the praises Cowley had once received, expresses the most extreme views of the mid-Victorian period.

Almost written in the same key was William Howitt's notice of Cowley in his review of the *Homes and Haunts of the most eminent British Poets*. Cowley, according to him, deserved « the almost utter neglect » into which he had fallen, for his poems are :

... overloaded with the most outrageous conceits, and his whole system of versification is at once affected, artificial, and yet rugged and often mean... In fact, Cowley seems to have been a man who could not be permanently and decidedly anything. He could not rise out of affectations, and dubious, half-way sorts of positions, either in poetry or in life... He was unluckily always spying about on the outside of his subject, and never plunging boldly into it...²⁰.

The Rev. Whitwell Elwin could likewise wonder at the reverence with which Cowley was spoken of by Pope in *Windsor Forest*, for he merely saw in his poetry « a puzzle from its contradictory qualities... His far-fetched similes debase the subject they are intended to elevate and adorn... », and his final impression was that of « dullness, laboured and negligent by turns »²¹.

Perhaps the attitude of the age was best shown in the advice James Hannay gave to would-be students of English Literature

19. *North British Review*. February 1847 (p. 365-400).

20. *Homes and Haunts of the most eminent British Poets*. By William Howitt (The third edition, 1857, p. 40).

21. *The Works of Alexander Pope*. A new edition... Corrected in part by the late Right Honourable John Wilson Crocker. With introduction and notes by the Rev. Whitwell Elwin... and W. J. Courthope. London, 1871 (I, p. 333).

in 1866. He first drew attention to Cowley's past glory, and « the complete oblivion » into which he had now sunk...

If our student, after reading Johnson's life of him, should care to turn the forgotten poet up, in Anderson's or Chalmers's Poets, well and good. He will probably agree with Lord Macaulay in recognising his « admirable genius »... But we do not feel justified in dictating the task to him, while so much remains to be read that has prior claims on his attention ²².

Past the years of enthusiastic worship, past those of vehement reproach, Cowley had reached the stage of indifference. Few were those who would now go out of their way to meet him.

One of the critics who gave the clearest expression to the general contempt for metaphysical poetry, and the distinction between prose-writer and poet, was Taine. For the French critic, the poetry of Cowley embodied the final stage in the decay of the Renaissance. No feelings, no thoughts, no inspiration remained, but the idle extravagance of words : « du galimatias ».

... Rarement, l'épuisement littéraire fut plus sensible. Il a tous les moyens de dire ce qui lui plaira, et justement il n'a rien à dire. Le fonds a disparu, laissant à sa place une forme vide... Sauf quelques vers descriptifs, sauf deux ou trois tendresses gracieuses, il ne sent rien, il ne fait que parler; il n'est poète que de cervelle... Après avoir lu deux cents pages, on a envie de lui donner des soufflets...

This sweeping condemnation met its exact counterpart in the picture Taine drew of Cowley as a prose-writer. His whole talent lay there, in his reasonableness, his politeness, his learning :

... Cowley est un écrivain, le plus ancien de tous ceux qui, en Angleterre, méritent ce nom. Sa prose est aussi aisée et aussi sensée que sa poésie est contournée et déraisonnable. Un « honnête homme » qui écrit pour d'honnêtes gens, à peu près de la façon dont il leur parlerait s'il était avec eux dans un salon, voilà, je crois, l'idée que, dans notre dix-septième siècle, on se faisait d'un bon auteur; c'est l'idée que les Essais de Cowley laissent de sa personne; c'est ce genre de talent que les écrivains de l'âge prochain vont prendre pour modèle, et il est le premier de cette grave et aimable lignée qui, par Temple, rejoint Addison ²³.

22. *Course of English Literature*. By James Hannay, 1866 (p. 205-208).

23. *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* (1st ed. 1863. — 1916 ed. I, p. 342-344).

Such an absolute contrast was of course meant to express artistically the transitional part played by Cowley, as a poet of the Renaissance and a prose-writer of modern times, and so far, though with much qualification, it may be held true. But it also betrayed a grave misinterpretation of Cowley's poetical talent, not from a want of insight, but from a deliberate refusal to look beyond the externals, and find the soul hidden within the body of the verse.

Before Taine, Villemain had similarly treated Cowley, though denying him neither « strength », nor « imagination » and laying the responsibility of his defects upon his time. He thus defined him (calling him : « le vieux Cowley ») :

Son goût un peu bizarre, mêlé d'originalité anglaise et d'affectation italienne, remontait à l'époque qui avait précédé la guerre civile; mais une empreinte française se mêle à ses derniers ouvrages ²⁴.

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No English critic went so far in systematization as Taine. Few even followed upon Hallam's and Elwin's traces. Most kept to the traditional groove, and carefully sifted the good from the bad according to their own individual tastes.

Even now, strange to say, the old enthusiasm was preserved by some. Robert Bell, for instance, thought Cowley superior to Donne « in the grasp and earnestness of his writings », and admired his *Pindarics* : « they are irregular enough, but it is not inharmonious irregularity ». As to the *Davideis*, said Bell, let us remember the author's youth, and we shall be more delighted « at the vast scope of reflection and knowledge it embraces » than shocked « at its redundancies » ²⁵. An exalted panegyric may also

24. *Cours de Littérature Française par M. Villemain* (Tableau de la Littérature Française au XVIII^e siècle. Nouvelle édition. Paris, 1873, p. 87; and about the *Odes*, p. 36).

H. Lucas, in his *Curiosités dramatiques et littéraires*, 1855, devoted some pages to an analysis of *The Mistress*. Philarette Chasles alluded to the extent of his imagination in an article on Goethe (*Etudes sur l'Allemagne, Ancienne et Moderne*. Paris, 1854, p. 342).

25. *Lives of the most eminent literary and scientific men of Great Britain. English Poets*. London, 1839 (p. 50-65). He gave an interesting account of metaphysical poetry as « double-natured poetry ».

be found in J. Welch's *Alumni Westmonasterienses* ²⁶.

On the other side, some felt restrained from taking him seriously by the enormity of his errors, in spite of a genius they were willing to acknowledge. Thus Dibdin described him :

A most singular and extraordinary writer, who produced a great deal to amuse the fancy, and but little to fix the mind... I look upon Cowley, he added, to have been the reverse of Shakespeare, for he destroyed a fervid and splendid genius by running it into everything quaint and fantastic, instead of permitting it to indulge itself in simplicity and sublimity. Thus his ideas are mature in childhood, and childish in old age... His fancy was perpetually upon the stretch, and he for ever shunned what should interest the heart, for that which could only astonish the imagination; and yet, with tinsel, quaintness, and most tormenting expletives, we find him now and then a wonderful poet... ²⁷.

G. L. Craik gave a more moderate and truer account of him in his *History of English Literature*. He insisted on his relations with Donne, and stated him to have been « a mere modernization and dilution » of his master. The same features were present in both, but, in Cowley, appeared « somewhat less forced and fantastical, a good deal less daring in every way, but unfortunately also infinitely less poetical ». He blamed *The Mistress* as being « frost work », yet he discovered « grace and dignity » in the *Pindarics* and he of course delighted in « the elegant playfulness of style and fancy » of the *Anacreontics*, as well as in « the natural, pure, and flowing eloquence » of his *Essays* ²⁸.

The *Pindarics* received mitigated praise in the *Edinburgh Review*, on the occasion of Cary's translation of Pindar, his bondage to the metaphysical fashion being again deplored :

26. *Alumni Westmonasterienses* (1852 ed., p. 110) For a more moderate account, cf. S. A. Alibone : *A critical Dictionary of English Literature, and British and American Authors, living and deceased*. Philadelphia, 1859 (I, p. 437-8).

27. *A Complete History of the Stage*. Written by Mr. Dibdin (Vol. IV, p. 80, sq...). He spoke elsewhere of « the depth of feeling that occasionally bursts from Cowley » (*The Library Companion; or, the young man's Guide and the old man's comfort in the choice of a library*. By the Rev. T. S. Dibdin. II, p. 722. London, 1875).

28. *A compendious History of English Literature and of the English Language, from the Norman Conquest*. With numerous specimens. By G. L. Craik. London, 1861 (II, p. 85, 107).

Cowley, with all his genius, in some respects akin to that of Pindar, will not help the reader... to a just conception of his professed prototype... Ever and anon there is a noble burst of lyric ardour : but some piece of quaint frigidity is sure to intervene, that damps and extinguishes the flame. His better nature strives, but strives in vain, against his metaphysical school...²⁹.

The same note was sounded by H. Neele in a lecture on *Epic and Narrative Poetry*. Cowley, as an epic poet, was decidedly bad, the *Daideis* was « disfigured » by conceits, heavily narrated, without living characters. Scattered beauties lay here and there, but they were lyrical beauties, and indeed Cowley was « one of the earliest names in eminence » in the field of lyricism :

It is principally in reading his Odes that we lament those metaphysical conceits which obscure the reputation of a genius of the first rate ability... His very faults are the offspring of genius...³⁰.

Such lyrical poems as the elegy *On the Death of William Hervey* found as warm admirers as ever³¹.

A contributor to the *St. James's Magazine* significantly wavered between admiration and contempt, unable, as it seemed, not to wonder at his genius, but equally unable to overlook his specific errors. He called him « a poet in the truest sense of the word », explaining :

He was undoubtedly a man of great attainments; his erudition was immense; his knowledge of human nature the result of that instinctive power of comprehension which seems to divine as if by intuition all human motives, and anticipate all human result.

He had a true creative power, and his influence over the English language was entirely beneficial. On the whole, he was « one of the very few whose claims to longevity are eloquently justified and who has yet been determinedly ignored by succeeding times ». The reason for which accident lay in his adherence to the metaphysical creed :

29. *The Edinburgh Review*. April. 1834 (Vol. LIX, p. 125). They were summarily dismissed in a later article of the same review (vol. CII, p. 517. October 1855) as « lawless vagaries ».

30. *Lectures on English Poetry from the reign of Edward the Third to the time of Burns and Cowper*... By Henry Neele... London, 1839 (3rd ed.).

31. Cf. *Blackwood's Magazine*. June 1841 (Vol. XLIX, p. 777) in an article « On Personification ».

His verses, instinct with the spirit of poetry, are degraded through the preposterous medium through which they are vehicled... his conceits spoil his poetry, and his poetry spoils his conceits... No stanza could be considered perfect without its being loaded with imagery which was meritorious in proportion as it was inconceivable...

It was not surprising, therefore, that he should have been « shelved with other exponents of an evanescent and past form of art ». As to the various parts of Cowley's works, *The Mistress* was found interesting from a psychological point of view, but flights of true poesy were ever and again intercepted by « absurdly extravagant images ». The *Pindarics* were also unfortunately turned into a preposterous imitation of Pindar by ever-recurring anti-climaxes. And, in spite of intermittent beauties, the *Davidis* stopped short of perfection through a certain « want of sprightliness », in the style and versification ³².

Such an estimate is characteristic of the action Cowley exerted on most readers. Nothing, or, at any rate, little, pleased them when they looked into the detail of his works; and yet they felt attracted by the talent and the wealth of thought concealed behind the tinsel of the form. The interesting point in the period was the increasing recognition of this deep originality. Though definitely hostile to the metaphysical manner of style, critics now began to obtain a true grasp of it, and understand, beyond the Anacreontic grace, the deeper meaning of Cowley's poetry.

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In fact, the article in the *St. James's Magazine* was only one out of several, all tending to a sort of resurrection of Cowley's works, especially of that part which had been unduly underrated when the test of reason only was applied to it. Instead of hard cold-blooded censure, and a constant harping on his faults, the enthusiasm of former days seemed to revive, and praises were again, though more cautiously, given him. Deliberate efforts were made to raise him again to something like his former eminence.

32. *St. James's Magazine*, November, 1868 (*A Metaphysical poet* (Vol. VIII (N. S.)), p. 209-214).

Besides notices in histories or dictionaries, forced upon their authors by the very nature of their subject, spontaneous articles were born out of a free choice, inspired with a desire to do Cowley justice. Thus, in a tentative manner, the essay we have just analysed. Thus, as early as 1847, a writer in the *American Whig Review* had exalted Cowley's nimble genius³³, and some years later another, in *The Leisure Hour*, had endeavoured to restore Cowley's fame as an epic and pindaric poet³⁴. The Rev. R. A. Willmott dwelt upon his love of « country seclusion », solitude, and natural scenes, and, commenting on Johnson's saying : « there is more sense in a line of Cowley than in a page of Pope », remarked : « other poets may be read; he is to be studied »³⁵.

In the *Christian Remembrancer* for December 1860 the Rev. William Stebbing devoted to him an article over thirty pages long, which he later still enlarged and printed in book-form³⁶. He first defined Cowley's position accurately :

The blaze of fame of the incomparable poet has dwindled till it is saved from absolute extinction only by the favour of compilers of elegant extracts.

— a pessimistic view, no doubt, since a limited circle of readers remained interested in him, but true if the public at large was considered —. Then Stebbing protested against this unjust decay :

In him are seen glimpses of glorious poetry, and a poetical, though not, it may be, a philosophical depth and truthfulness, which should have preserved him, as politico-poetical vigour has saved Dryden³⁷.

Some years later his esteem of Cowley was at once deeper and

33. *The American Whig Review*. July 1847 (Vol. VI, p. 29-36).

34. *The Leisure Hour*, 11 July 1863 (Vol. XII, p. 443-445).

35. *A Journal of Summer-time in the Country*. By Robert Aris Willmott (4th edition. London, 1864, p. 157-8. — 1st edition, 1849) Willmott also alluded to the *Davideis* (p. 140) and compared Cowley with Fontenelle (p. 178).

36. *The Christian Remembrancer*. December 1860 (Vol. XXXVIII, p. 457-489). Reprinted in *Some Verdicts of History Reviewed*. London, 1887.

William Stebbing is not to be confused with T. R. R. Stebbing who published in 1867 a translation of Longinus on the Sublime, in which he fastened on Cowley, as the late XVIIIth century had done, merely to find examples of bombast, anti-climaxes, etc... (Cf. notes, p. 8, 10, etc...).

37. He duly praised the various parts of his hero's works, his Latin poems, for instance, which he found more natural and powerful than those of Milton (p. 51), his *Davideis*, though apt to be too ponderous and lacking in originality of treatment (p. 54), etc...

more precise. He discerned true greatness in the man, sweetness in the poet : « his verse... is autumnal, measured, and lingering; a fragrance, as from stately, ancient gardens... ». « But thoughtfulness, rising, deepening to sublimity, was his forte », witness his odes to the Royal Society, to Hobbes, to Light, on Life. His intellect searched in every direction, though with excessive subtlety, and at times extravagant boldness in *The Mistress*, and in *The Chronicle*, where the critic detected « the fashionable licence of the seventeenth century speech and sentiment ». But he was perhaps too reasonable, too intellectual: « his pulse beats too temperately for a poet ». He was much greater as a prose-writer, being « a master of prose and its reformer »³⁸. The conclusion Stebbing reached in both cases was that Cowley deserved to be much better known than he was.

In the same rescuing mood, R. C. Trench challenged Hallam's statement about Cowley's reputation having been raised above his deserts. For not only had Cowley as a man been fully worthy of his contemporaries' admiration, but as a poet, too, he attained true eminence, as his ode *To the Royal Society* alone might prove³⁹.

Objective criticism was inaugurated by William Minto in his painstaking analysis of his prose. In the general review of his works which preceded it, he remarked upon the difference between his prose and his verse : he was more esteemed as a prose-writer, and especially as an essayist, than as a poet. Indeed, his true intellectual powers were to be found in his verse, but his prose was admirable for its charming form, the « singular ease in choosing apt words », the « freshness and spirit » with which he combined them⁴⁰.

As Minto had examined his prose, A. W. Ward analysed his dramas, with an interest which they had never before attracted. *Love's Riddle* and the *Naufragium Jocularé* he esteemed innocent

38. *Five Centuries of English Verse*. Impressions. By William Stebbing. Oxford, 1913 (p. 181-192).

39. *A Household Book of British Poetry*. London, 1868. By Richard Chevenix Trench, D. D.

40. *A Manual of English Prose-Literature*, biographical and critical, designed mainly to show characteristics of style. By William Minto. London, 1872 (p. 333-343).

and pleasing entertainments. He was far from finding *The Cutter of Coleman Street* a bad play, in spite of its « occasional coarseness and the farcical improbabilities of its plot »; for he detected « freshness », and even « boisterousness » in the style, « considerable humour » in the characters of Jolly and Aurelia, « touches of pathos » in those of Truman Junior and Lucia, « from which an inferior and less self-confident hand would perhaps have shrunk ». Above all he praised « the spirit of manliness which pervades this comedy », the moral courage of the poet who was bold enough to ridicule « the scum of the loyal party at the very time when its ignobler elements were actively striving to remain at the top ». In fact, when starting upon his analysis of the *Cutter*, Ward had expressed his opinion of Cowley as being a « great name », « not towering in an eminence like Milton's but rising far above the level of the ordinary literary adherents of the royal cause »⁴¹.

T. H. Ward similarly reviewed his achievements in the realm of lyricism. He was acutely conscious of the problem of Cowley's reputation : his glory in his lifetime and immediately after his death; then oblivion -- which Ward makes much deeper than it actually was :

In thirty years he had sunk out of notice, and his name had become a mere memory, mentioned honoris causa but no more... Except for a few students like Lamb and Sir Egerton Brydges, Cowley's verse is in this century unread and unreadable.

Yet, he continued, criticism has to justify great names. There must be something in a man who was regarded by his age, and that an age which boasts to have outgrown all illusions, as the most profound and ingenious of its writers.

Hence it was with a wakeful curiosity that Ward scrutinized the poet's works, searching for the greatness which made him famous once. He found many grievous faults : the *Miscellanies* showed above all « his curious inability to distinguish good from bad... he mars poem after poem with some scholastic absurdity or

41. *A History of English Dramatic Literature to the death of Queen Anne*. By Adolphus William Ward (New edition, London, 1899, III, p. 165 n. 187, 327, 1st ed. 1875). He also noticed Bp. Ken's debt to the *Davideis* (*Collected Papers...* by Sir A. W. Ward, Cambridge 1921. Vol. IV; Literary, p. 148-158).

comparison drawn from a science that has nothing to do with poetry ». *The Mistress*, an utter failure, contained « neither grace, nor glow, nor tenderness, nor truth ». The *Pindarics* were used by the poet as a receptacle for his most extravagant imagery, though, when he took the subject to heart, he could word his thought in beautiful lines. The *Davideis* was « a school exercise and no more ». And yet Ward found Cowley truly admirable as having :

knowledge, reflection, calmness and clearness of judgment : the gifts of the age of Science and Prose... and with these a rhetorical and moral fervour that made him a power in our literature, greater, for the moment, than any that had gone before ⁴².

It may be said that such a verdict was not, on the whole, very different from that of a man like Hallam. And yet a hidden change had taken place, which had deeply altered the attitude of the later critic. Hallam accepted Cowley as an unavoidable but rather deplorable fact; Ward examined him with an eager desire to know him well, as a most interesting case in literary history, and was ready to rescue him from his woeful position.

This tendency towards a fuller recognition of Cowley's worth was most apparent in two articles published, one in an English, the other in an American periodical publication, the first of which no doubt gave a decisive impulse to the revival of Cowley and his reintegration among English writers worthy of note. These are the articles of Edmund Gosse in the *Cornhill Magazine* for December 1876, and of William Cullen Bryant in the *North American Review* for May 1877.

Gosse was inspired at the outset by exactly the same curiosity and the same desire to understand Cowley as Ward or Stebbing ⁴³. And he went through Cowley's works with the intention of answering the two unavoidable questions : « Why Cowley ever

42. *The English Poets. Selections, with critical Introductions by various writers, and a general Introduction by Matthew Arnold.* Edited by Thomas Humphrey Ward. London, 1880 (Vol. II, p. 234 sq.. The introduction was written by Ward).

43. *The Cornhill Magazine*, December 1876 (Vol. XXXIV, p. 718-737). It was printed in book form in *Seventeenth Century Studies*, 1883 (1897 ed., p. 191-228).

attained so immense a reputation, and why having once gained it, he has so completely lost it », his inward feeling being all the while that, « however great his faults, this depreciation is unjust and this ridicule absurd ». He intended to protest against the condemnation of his poetry, for, while his *Essays* « have held their ground in our literature », « as a poet he is a dead name ». So, in the course of a pleasantly inaccurate biography of his hero, he examined his various works, showing the extraordinary precocity of the boy poet in *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and how, very soon, as soon as his second poetical attempt, *Constantia and Philetus*, his ambition gained the upper hand over his native genius; he praised *Love's Riddle* as « one of the most readable things Cowley ever executed », and as written « in good blank verse, with considerable sprightliness of dialogue, and with several threads of intrigues that are held well in hand, and drawn skilfully together at last ».

He felt, however, absolute contempt for *The Mistress*. This « pocket compendium of the science of being ingenious in affairs of the heart » was to him « the most unreadable production of its author, dry and tedious, without tenderness, without melancholy, without music... ».

In spite of fine lines here and there,

... scarcely one [of the poems] is readable throughout, scarcely one is even ridiculous enough for quotation. All are simply dull, overloaded with ingenious, prosaic fancy, and set to eccentric measures of the author's invention, that but serve to prove his metrical ineptitude.

Such vehemence is rather surprising, coming from one who professed his eagerness to understand Cowley, and would prove that Gosse (who, by the way, thought Henry More was responsible for these affectations of Cowley) had not quite realized what the metaphysical style stood for, and merely hated it on the surface. Among the *Miscellanies* he made a choice, satisfied with *The Motto*, « an admirable poem on his artistic aspirations and ambitions », *Friendship in Absence*, « a prettily conceived poem... unhappily spoiled by an inherent wooden ingenuity that never ceases to obtrude itself », *The Chronicle*, « an amusing *jeu d'esprit* », and the elegies on Hervey and on Crashaw, « perhaps the finest wheat that the winnowing of criticism will finally leave on this wide granary-floor ». Singularly enough, he disliked the

Anacreontics, though « frequently pretty and sparkling », for he perceived, « some sad discords » in them, and thought Stanley's translation endowed « with a great deal more spirit ». He agreed with most critics in thinking the *Pindaric odes* « a dangerous innovation » where, in spite of occasional lines worth remembering, « the grandiose language and the broken versification unite to weary the ear and defy the memory ». As to the *Davideis* Gosse was content humorously to warn readers from taking it with them « in a quiet place some summer afternoon », unless they wanted « to slumber soundly », the only commendable features in the poem being the versification and David's « serenade » to Michol.

As a conclusion, the critic defined Cowley's place and importance. He looked upon him as the leader in didactic and rhetorical poetry in England. A doubtful compliment, since his part consisted in making « oratorical effect take the place of the observation and inspired interpretation of nature ». But his contemporaries liked him for this very reason :

The severity of Cowley's writings, their intellectual quality, their cold elevation and dry intelligence, were as charming as they were novel.

The charm, however, could not last, and when what is called « naturalistic poetry » brought back a return « to primal forms and primal feeling », with Cowper, and Collins, and Wordsworth above all, he was doomed to be stigmatized and forgotten. That this oblivion was unjust, it was Gosse's whole endeavour to show. He perceived in Cowley, even in Cowley as a poet, unmistakable signs of greatness. We do not feel sure that the critic perceived these signs truly. His denunciation of the *Odes* and of *The Mistress*, coupled with his lack of appreciation of the *Anacreontics*, indicate that he did not wholly grasp the complex art and mind of Cowley. If he was leading the way to the future, and to some extent opening through this article a new era in the reputation of Cowley, it was unconsciously or half-consciously at most : for his taste, his actual judgment on the poet belonged to the past. He considered him as a curious figure, most of whose works were justly forgotten, and indeed beyond any hopes of a revival. Did he not call himself « the last of his admirers »?

Inaccurate and critically short-sighted as it might be, the article was at least filled with an inspiriting good-will, and, as such, well calculated to give a more definite shape to the increasing interest critics were taking in Cowley.

Its American counter-part was published in the *North American Review* by W. C. Bryant⁴⁴. On a more modest scale Cowley's works were successively appreciated. Bryant found the *Davideis* less dull than ingenious, and admired the dexterity of the poet « in stringing upon the slight thread of his narrative unexpected thoughts and remote allusions ». He was less offended at the *Odes* than entertained by their conceits. While wondering at the dialectical skill of *The Mistress*, he regretted the absence of any sincere emotion. The *Anacreontics* were, to his mind, even better than their model,

... sprightly, joyous, seemingly poured forth by one who writes verses because he cannot help it, and they are free from the ruggedness of versification which Cowley rarely took pains to avoid.

Even Bryant, however, could not gainsay that his verses « have few strains of poetic enthusiasm and are never pathetic ». They might best be described by the term « ingenious », but this was exactly « what the age demanded ». Of the prose too much could not be said, and it is « as graceful and natural as his poetry is ingenious ».

This analysis, though by no means blindly encomiastic, may seem unduly indulgent to Cowley. But its very eagerness to excuse and shelter him from censure, showed, still more perhaps than Gosse's more elaborate and also more reserved vindication, that critics were beginning to adopt towards him an attitude strangely different from the one we had witnessed in the earlier part of the period. For a long span of years, Cowley's name had vanished amid general indifference. Minds seemed alienated from him by wholly different pursuits. Curious readers were drawn by his very remoteness. Such literary figures as Miss Mitford and Mrs. Browning gathered his flowers with tender hands, in pro-

44. *The North American Review*. May 1877 (Vol. CXXIV, p. 368-382).

portion, perhaps, as they were neglected by the Philistines, and it seemed he had to rely on feminine charity to live on.

Yet even among the orthodox school of critics a movement in his favour was discernible. Though their discriminative work proceeded on the whole along classical lines, showing that the Cowley tradition held fast, they evinced a growing apprehension of the poet's originality. Slowly, hesitatingly, he was coming back into his own.

Then, he found enthusiastic critics, who set to revealing the hidden treasures of his poetry, and their efforts, isolated and desultory, and at times indiscreet though they were, created an altered atmosphere round him. It would be untrue to turn these critics into a well defined group. They were united, however, by a common link. The tendency they all exhibited towards reviving Cowley was not merely derived from individual whims. It was not by a chance coincidence that they all felt this need growing at the same time. An underlying cause existed, of which these articles were the first visible tokens, and which was to spring forth and spread openly in the following period.

CHAPTER VII

- COWLEY REDIVIVUS

It is an acknowledged fact that the years 1875-1880 mark a turning point in the moral history of the English mind. After years of prosperity, and the self-satisfied optimism derived from material success, came new troubles and anxieties. The comfortable Victorian fabric was shattered, and the minds became bewildered in the confusion. An era of evolution had begun, not unlike that through which Cowley lived. To political and religious problems, economical issues were now superadded, but the perturbation was much the same.

A reaction set in against all the essential features of the preceding age. The rule of reason and science, the pursuit of purely material aims, the dogmatic spirit in which all questions had been settled, all the conventions which made up social and individual life, were questioned and threatened with destruction. In the world of letters and art, the long subdued spirit of freedom expanded into anarchy; for not only were the joys of independence relished, and the rights of the individual reasserted, but artists sought their way towards remote and strange realms. Leaving the trodden paths of common-sense and reason, eager for novel experiences, they eagerly welcomed rare, even morbid sensations, they shaped their ideas into paradoxes, transposed them into symbols, and turned their poems into musical, mysteriously connected images and impressions.

They seemed therefore ready for a full appreciation of metaphysical poetry. For their leanings were in no way different from

those Donne and Cowley had shown, two centuries earlier. They might find in metaphysical verse their own contempt for plainness and natural notions or phrases, their own longing for originality at any cost, their intellectual perversity, even to their own devices, in the use of an indirect mode of expression, here the symbol, there the conceit, or in the replacing logical links by associations of ideas. It was but natural that the metaphysical poets should be welcomed by an age which was, to a large extent, metaphysical itself.

In truth, they were revived, Donne of course, and Cowley, and also Crashaw, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell, King, Cleveland. Yet it can hardly be said that they were revived for their « metaphysical » qualities. It will be seen that Cowley was at first distinguished much for the same reasons, through the same aspects of his works, as in former periods, and that a true and active comprehension of his metaphysical manner has only prevailed of late years.

The revival of seventeenth century poets was originally due to the development of interest in the past which characterized the end of the last and the beginning of the present century, resulting in the close methodical investigation of the hidden treasures of English literature. Scholars set to work, editing old texts, resuscitating many forgotten authors. Notices, articles, and even books, reclaimed them, or endeavoured to reclaim them from the obscurity they had fallen into. « Scientific research » explored the past, and the more remote the search, the keener the joy of discovery. Gosse, at the end of his article on Cowley, acknowledged that he had yielded to this attraction :

I confess that I find a particular fascination in the study of these maimed and broken poets, these well-strung instruments upon whose throbbing strings Destiny has laid the pressure of her silencing fingers.

Sympathy was united, no doubt, with these scholastic efforts, literary merits were recognized, and we shall find in the criticism of this period upon Cowley unmistakable marks of keen appreciation of his talent. Yet, that for which the last decades of the nineteenth century seemed peculiarly well fitted, the adequate recognition of his metaphysical poetry, is hardly to be found, at least clearly expressed.

I

As we have noticed already, his revival was made clear by the sudden turn in the fortunes of his printed books. For the first time since 1721, his complete works were separately published. In 1881, the Rev. A. B. Grosart collected in two stately volumes all the productions of Cowley's pen, and a ponderous Memorial-Introduction, over one hundred and twenty packed pages in length, set his claims before the public. But Grosart's edition was limited, and A. R. Waller did great service to Cowley by presenting the public with his English writings in a more accessible and readable form.

Then came a series of partial reprints. They fall into two groups, according as they include his prose or his verse. The prose selections took the shape of popular, and even of class-books : appealing to the general public, or meant for instruction as part and parcel of English classical literature. Cowley's claims were firmly rooted in that quarter. The reprints from the poems, on the other hand, elegantly produced, were addressed to a chosen few, to readers desirous of out of the way knowledge. Thus was shown the transient, uncertain fate of Cowley's poetry, ever destined to be governed, not by any permanent appeal to its readers, but by individual tastes and ephemeral fashions.

Interest in Cowley was shown, besides, in various ways. Lord Roseberry quoted his opinion concerning Cromwell, and spoke highly of his style, calling the *Discourse* « a noble piece of prose »¹. John Burroughs protested against Hume preferring Parnell to Cowley. He had to look up for information about the former, « but of Cowley, even desultory readers like myself know something »; and he could read the *Essays* again and again, taking the book with him into the country : « Solitude seems to bring out its quality, as it does that of some people »².

1. *Miscellanies, Literary and Historical*. By Lord Roseberry. London, 1921 (I, p. 98).

2. *On the re-reading of books*. By John Burroughs (*The Century Magazine*, New-York, 1897. Vol. LV, p. 147).

Contributors to *The Quarterly* were now and then called upon to mention him. His lines on Mary Evelyn, John Evelyn's wife, were cited, for instance, in the course of a paper on the diarists of the Restoration. Johnson's choice among his poems was once more questioned: though he duly brought out the various talents of the poet, « it is curious — reflected the author — that he should have found little attraction in poems which, to readers in our day, have much more interest than those singled out by him »³. In the same mood, the readers of *Notes and Queries* made over forty questions and answers concerning him, some of these being actual articles⁴; while in *The Sewanee Review*, A. C. Judson devoted a paper to a description of Cowley's country life after 1660⁵.

Cowley, therefore, was still known, and read for pleasure. He possessed the « inner circle » of readers Grosart claimed for him.

II

The list of critical articles directly or indirectly dealing with Cowley's works is a long one. They might be divided into two classes, according to their respective origins. Some seem to arise from the subjects chosen for investigation, and appear, in a way, unavoidable. Thus Courthope writing a *History of English Poetry*, Saintsbury a *History of Criticism* or of *English Prosody*, could not well fail to devote at least some little space to Cowley. Neither could the contributors to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, nor Masterman in his survey of *the Age of Milton*, nor Masson in his *Life of Milton*, Gosse in *From Shakespeare to Pope*, Spingarn in *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, nor indeed many other critics whose opinions we shall record later.

A good many estimates, on the other hand, had no other source than the free will of their authors, and were presented as wholly voluntary contributions to the knowledge of Cowley. Such were of

3. *The Quarterly Review*. January 1896 (vol. CLXXXIII, p. 28), and January 1908 (vol. CCVIII, p. 87).

4. *Notes and Queries*. London. Cf. the articles of J. T. Curry (IX, 10, p. 1, and IX, 12, p. 342), those on Gray's imitations of Cowley (I, 4, p. 204, 252, 465, I, 6, p. 119); and that on his prose-works by J. M. G. (I, 5, p. 339), etc.

5. *Abraham Cowley in Arcadia*. By A. C. Judson (*The Sewanee Review*, 1923, vol. XXXI, p. 220-226).

course the various notices introductory to the editions of his works, from Grosart's Memorial-Introduction, to more moderate prefatory notes like those of Attenborough, Gough or Sparrow. There were also articles wholly devoted to him : those of Mac Bryde on the *Davideis*, for instance, or Drechsler on Cowley's love of nature, those of Yarnall, Fox, or Havelock Ellis, above all those of A. Nethercot, culminating in his book *Abraham Cowley, the Muses' Hannibal*. Even in studies on different though kindred subjects, Cowley's name was brought in, and his importance marked : thus J. Churton Collins, Van Doren, T. S. Eliot, in their essays on Dryden, or G. Williamson in his study of Donne.

Such a classification, however, does not hold true. Judgments on Cowley, whether spontaneous or not, show little difference in their appreciations, and none in the attitude adopted towards Cowley. Its main interest lies in the fact that it reveals the number of articles that may be termed voluntary, showing how marked a progress was being made in reviving Cowley by a thorough and comprehensive analysis of his talent.

If we want to divide into groups this mass of criticism, we must look, not at the form it assumes, but at the contents. We then perceive that some among these appreciations are general reviews of Cowley's position, whilst others take the shape of technical studies on special aspects of his works. This latter group is not only more numerous than the first, but also more significant. For we have long been accustomed, by now, to appreciative criticism containing little save subjective impressions. We find here the stamp of the new era, in the methodical scrutiny of an author's work along strictly objective lines — personal feelings receding into the background, while cold dispassionate scholarship is taking their place. Cowley came to be treated as one of the many facts of seventeenth century literature, and studied as such. The consequence was that the attention centred upon him was more historical than personal. His place, the part he played in the development of letters were given more prominence than his actual contributions. And indeed the present writer remembers how he was first attracted towards Cowley, not so much by the charm of his personality or the intrinsic merit of his writings, as by an interest in the period in which and for which he wrote.

It may therefore be stated that Cowley's fame now entered

upon a new stage. His works were studied as they never had been, there was no part of them which did not engage the attention of some scholar. He became thoroughly known. Yet this revival must not deceive us. He did not actually regain his lost popularity. He did not win again, except as an essayist, the favour of the public. He continued to be read only by a limited circle of inquisitive readers, and of critics professionally inquisitive. There seems no hope of his ever becoming popular again.

The fact remains, and an important fact it is, that those who studied him, from choice or from duty, felt something of the admiration and respect he had enjoyed for nearly a century after his death. An underlying current of sympathy may be detected under the voluntary objectivity of statements, and personal judgments evince a truer understanding of the poet's talent and parts.

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Articles dealing with special points of Cowley's works were mostly non-appreciative, and merely aimed at stating facts. They cannot, therefore, be said to enhance Cowley's reputation, for, restricted in scope, they were addressed to a very limited class of readers, professional students of literature, and might be described as « University criticism ». They are none the less significant, and if we compare them with earlier criticism from University men, chiefly in the late eighteenth century, we perceive how deep a change had taken place. These used to select Cowley for censure, and extracted, as it were, from his poems, anthologies of faults. Their nineteenth century successors considered him impartially, desirous only of attaining accurate information, favourably inclined if anything, and ready to welcome his good qualities. The poet's works were scrutinized in turn, from the point of view of form and matter, his prose as well as his verse, so that now nothing of importance remains unknown ⁶.

John Mac Laren Mac Bryde made an exhaustive review of the *Dauides*, tracing it first to its origins, adducing proofs of Cowley's

6. It is only fair to say that most of the work done on Cowley in recent years has been effected by American critics.

many borrowings, especially of his indebtedness to Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas, Crashaw's *Sospetto d'Herode*, the *Eneid*, and Tasso's *Jerusalem* (through Fairfax's translation). There even followed a systematic classification of Cowley's metrical tendencies, not only in the *Davideis*, but also in some of his earlier poems⁷.

Rudolf Kirsten had already studied at some length the relationship which united the *Davideis* and *Paradise Lost*, and gathered convincing evidence of Milton's conscious following in the footsteps of Cowley⁸. Mariana Woodhull chiefly opposed the two poems⁹. Elizabeth Nitchie incidentally dwelt upon the poet's love and intimate knowledge of Virgil, by bringing out the Virgilian elements of the 1656 preface, and the parts of the *Davideis* modelled on the *Eneid*¹⁰.

The *Pindaric odes* were as carefully explored by Robert Shafer in his dissertation on *The English ode to 1660* as the *Davideis* had been by Mac Bryde. He stressed Cowley's original part in the conception of the irregular ode, his deliberate abandonment of the stanzaic form of Pindar, and the novel use to which he put the already well-known free-verse.

And he also explained Cowley's failure to rival his model, owing to his want of lyrical genius and true enthusiasm, though his attempt was far from despicable :

Many of Cowley's odes do have, indeed, an undeniable dignity and broadness of sweep that is genuinely impressive...¹¹.

7. *A Study of Cowley's Davideis* (*Journal of Germanic Philology*, 1901, vol. II). The dissertation opened with the familiar query as to the causes of Cowley's neglect, and Mac Bryde answered it with the customary mixture of praise and reservation : « He had a loftiness of purpose and a seriousness of thought far in advance of the other poets of this school; yet he had not the strength to resist the popular taste, nor the judgment to select only the enduring qualities of his age. »

8. *Studie über das Verhältnis von Cowley und Milton*. Inaugural-Dissertation... Vorgelegt von Rudolf Kirsten. Meiningen, 1899.

9. *The Epic of Paradise Lost. Twelve Essays*. By Mariana Woodhull. New-York, 1907, p. 245... — W. Macneile Dixon, writing the history of Epic and Heroic Poetry felt nothing but contempt for the *Davideis*, which he cast among the epic poems « that never lived » (*English Epic and Heroic Poetry*, London, 1912, p. 224).

10. *Virgil and the English Poets*, by Elizabeth Nitchie. New-York, 1919.

11. *The English Ode to 1660. An Essay in literary History*. A Dissertation... presented... by Robert Shafer. Princeton, 1918.

A. H. Nethercot took care to define the relation of Cowley's *Pindarics* to Pindar's Odes, showing how Cowley's deviation from his model was not due to a mistake but to settled intentions¹².

Such a demonstration was far from unnecessary, for most critics clung, as their predecessors had done, to the notion that Cowley's initiative was entirely due to his misconception of the true pindaric ode, and severely rebuked him for this supposed ignorance. Edmund Gosse, for instance, boldly asserted that the edition in which Cowley discovered Pindar was responsible for his error :

It was printed, of course, with no choral divisions; and in the old metrical confusion, and to an observer so little perspicuous as Cowley [?], the odes seemed to be fashioned in absolute irregularity.

So that Cowley imitated Pindar, according to Gosse, « without grasping, or even attempting to emulate, the structure of the Greek strophe, antistrophe, and epode ». He elsewhere called Cowley's endeavour : « a blunder founded on a misconception... a mere vague caricature of Pindar's brilliant odes ». As late as 1924 he persevered in his condemnation of the Cowleyan type of ode, « a noisome parasitic weed... the horrid kind of ode which delighted the formlessness of the Restoration... », as being based upon a « hasty study » of Pindar¹³.

Nor was Gosse alone in his attack against the *Pindarics*. W. Sharp thought their influence had been « almost entirely hurtful »¹⁴, R. Garnett called them « the miscreation of a true poet »¹⁵, R. Macdonald Alden, C. F. Johnson, C. M. Gayley in turn expressed similar dislike¹⁶.

12. *The Relation of Cowley's Pindarics to Pindar's Odes* (*Modern Philology*, 1921 (vol. XIX, p. 107-109).

13. a) *English Odes*. Selected by Edmund Gosse. London, 1881. Introduction, p. xv. — b) *The Ode, and Pindarics*, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. — c) *The Life of William Congreve*. London, 1924, p. 145.

14. *Great Odes : English and American*. Selected and edited, with an Introductory note, by William Sharp. London, 1890 (Preface, p. viii, xxiii).

15. *The Age of Dryden*. By R. Garnett. London, 1895 (p. 72, 73).

16. R. Macdonald Alden. *English Verse. Specimens illustrating its principles and history*. New-York, 1904 (p. 308); and *Introduction to Poetry. For students of English Literature*. London, 1909 (p. 341-343). — C. F. Johnson. *Forms of English Poetry*. New-York (n. d.), p. 154-158. — C. Mills Gayley and B. Putnam Kurtz. *Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism*. Boston, 1920 (p. 18).

These hasty strictures, going as they did against the facts, would seem to prove that many critics spoke of Cowley's odes only by hearsay, or did not take the trouble to investigate into the reasons of the poet's practice.

Cowley's other lyrical productions did not share the same fate as the *Pindaric odes* : they were little studied, even little discussed, *The Mistress* being seemingly thought too bad, and the *Anacreonics* too good, to call for much comment. The only article devoted to *The Mistress* was J. Sparrow's note on the various readings of the text¹⁷, and he was also the only critic who analysed it at any length¹⁸.

For the rest of his works Cowley found an able exponent in A. H. Nethercot who successively examined his *Essays*, his *Letters*, his critical utterances, and his plays. The exact chronology of the *Essays* was ascertained by him (as far as it may be done), and Cowley's indebtedness to Montaigne, his true originality, the nature of his epicureanism, aptly defined¹⁹. His place and importance in the development of the English Essay had been emphasized in A. A. Tilley's contribution to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*²⁰.

Nethercot also numbered and classified his letters²¹, and collected his scattered critical dicta, whether dealing with the poet's function in general, or with the specific rules for the various genres²². He further analysed his comedies, stated their origins, and traced their fortunes step by step with much industry, collecting all the information to be gathered from histories of the drama,

17. *The Text of Cowley's Mistress* (*Review of English Studies*, January 1927).

18. *The Mistress, with other select Poems of Abraham Cowley. 1618-1667*. London, 1926 (Introduction).

19. *Abraham Cowley's Essays* (*The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. January, 1930, vol. XXIX, pp. 114-130). — It is rather surprising to find only an occasional mention of Cowley in E. N. S. Thompson : *The Seventeenth Century Essay* (University of Iowa Studies. Vol. III, N° 3. 1926, p. 132).

20. *The Essay and the Origin of Modern English Prose*, vol. VII, chapter XVI, pp. 377-379.

21. *The Letters of Abraham Cowley* (*Modern Language Notes*. June 1928. Vol. XLIII, pp. 369-375).

22. *Abraham Cowley's Discourse concerning Style* (*Review of English Studies*. October 1926, vol. II).

such as Fleay's, Homer-Smith's, J. Laidler's, W. W. Greg's, J. Mark's, G. C. Moore-Smith's or A. Nicoll's²³.

Cowley's critical abilities had been fully brought out by G. Saintsbury, who thus summed up his views :

He ought to have given us criticism of real importance. He had the paramount, if not exclusive, literary interests, which are necessary to a great critic; he had the knowledge; and he was perhaps the first man in England to possess the best kind of critical style... the style of well-bred argument...

He was hampered, however, first because his attention was diverted towards science, and chiefly because of his complex position :

There were two poets in Cowley, and each of these was wont to get in the way of the other. The one was a « metaphysical » of the high flight, who at least would, if he could, have been as intensely fantastic as Donne, and as gracefully fantastic as Suckling. The other was a classical, « sensible », couplet-poet, who was working out Ben Jonson's theories... The entanglement of these was sufficiently detrimental to his poetry; but it would have been absolutely fatal to his criticism, which must either have perpetually contradicted itself or else have wandered in a maze, perplexing as perplexed²⁴.

In a similar fashion, Hamelius, Gayley, Miller, Spingarn, Van Doren, emphasized the interest and the limitations of his critical achievements. C. M. Gayley, for instance, said :

Cowley is indirectly the promoter of the refined manner and liberal method which characterize the poetics of Dryden,

23. Abraham Cowley as dramatist (*Review of English Studies*. January 1928, vol. IV). — Cf. F. G. Fleay. *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*. 1559-1642. London, 1891. — Homer-Smith. *Pastoral Influence in the English Drama* (P. M. L. A., 1897, vol. XII, pp. 443-449). — Josephine Laidler. *A History of Pastoral Drama in England until 1709* (*Englische Studien*... Leipzig, vol. XXXV, p. 237, 238, 1905). — W. W. Greg. *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama*... London, 1906 (pp. 362-367). — Jeannette Marks. *English Pastoral Drama*. London, 1908 (p. 86). — G. C. Moore-Smith. *College-plays performed in the University of Cambridge*. London, 1923 (p. 10, sq...). — Allardyce Nicoll. *A History of the Restoration Drama*. 1660-1700. Cambridge, 1923.

24. G. Saintsbury. *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe. From the Earliest texts to the present day*. London and Edinburgh, 1902 (vol. II, p. 366-7).

and Van Doren, speaking of the preface to Gondibert and Waller's and Cowley's poems :

They prescribed the materials for the new poetry, and they analyzed the psychological processes by which it would be produced...²⁵.

As W. Minto had already dissected the mechanism of his prose style, his prosodic value as a couplet-writer, a composer of lyrics, and a pindarist, was defined by G. Saintsbury²⁶.

Leaving the form for the thought, we find an overwhelmingly conscientious study of Cowley's attitude towards Nature, in a dissertation by Max Drechsler, in which the author drew up a complete list of all the images, metaphors, comparisons, derived from natural sources in the poet's works, and reviewed the different elements that give his feeling for Nature its specific colouring. Anna von der Heide and Myra Reynolds also tried to determine his position as a nature poet²⁷.

His epicureanism was evoked in an illuminating essay by Richard Aldington, in which a prominent place (perhaps unduly prominent) was given to the French influence in the shaping of Cowley's ideal²⁸; his interest in science was noticed by Samuel

25. *Die Kritik in der Englischen Literatur des 17 und 18 Jahrhunderts*. Von Paul Hamelius. Leipzig, 1897 (p. 48, 53...). — *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism. The bases in Aesthetics and Poetics*. By C. Mills Gayley and F. Newton Scott. Boston, 1899 (p. 397-8). — *The Historical point of View in English Literary Criticism from 1570 to 1700*. By G. M. Miller. Heidelberg, 1913 (p. 81...). — J. Spingarn. *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford, 1908 (Introduction, pp. 35, 36, and vol. II, pp. 77-90). — Mark Van Doren. *The Poetry of John Dryden*. New-York, 1920 (p. 30). — Cf. also R. P. Cowl. *The Theory of Poetry in England. Its development in Doctrines and Ideas from the 16th century to the 19th century*. London, 1914, where extracts from the *Prefaces* are quoted, p. 13, 71, 160...

26. *A History of English Prosody, from the twelfth century to the present day*. London, 1908 (1923 ed., p. 286-293). — In an article of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Mrs. Meynell drew attention to the prosodic value of his and Crashaw's alexandrines (*Pall Mall Gazette*, April 28, 1897, p. 3).

27. Max Drechsler. *Der Natursinn in Abraham Cowleys Werken...* Leipzig, 1908 (pp. 1-135). — *Das Naturgefühl in der Englischen Dichtung im Zeitalter Miltons*, von Anna von der Heide. Heidelberg, 1905 (Einleitung, p. 104-8). — *The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry between Pope and Wordsworth*. By Myra Reynolds. Chicago, 1909 (p. 2..., 28...).

28. Richard Aldington. *Cowley and the French Epicureans* (*New Statesman*, 1921, vol. XVIII. Reprinted in *Literary Studies and Reviews*. 1924, p. 103-112). — The French influence proper on Cowley was casually mentioned in A. H. Upham : *The French Influence in English Literature from the acces-*

Gee, and Hermann Ullrich²⁹, and his interest in agriculture by J. de Loach³⁰; the clash between poetic traditions and scientific progress in his verse was pointed out by C. S. Duncan³¹, and R. E. Jones endeavoured to trace the change in his prose style to the influence of the Royal Society³².

Through these various technical studies, all the outstanding features of Cowley were brought out, and the origin, nature, and importance of his undertakings were scrupulously exhibited by a careful gathering of facts. It may be said, no doubt, that little was added to Cowley's fame by these statements, since they dealt with his writings, irrespective of their artistic value. They proved useful, however, since, by increasing our knowledge of Cowley, they enabled us to do him justice and set him in his due rank. Moreover, though showing a historical interest in Cowley rather than a personal one, placing his works beside similar productions, considering them less as the outcome of individual merit, than as the expression of social and literary forces, they were yet actuated in varying degrees by sympathy for Cowley himself. He was brought forward at first as a curious object, worthy of an inquiry, and his talent next detained the student of literature by its very merit. So that most of these objective studies took the shape of protests, implicit or explicit, against the excessive neglect which Cowley had suffered.

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This was indeed the most striking feature of the age : a desire to spread a knowledge of Cowley, to reclaim him from the

sion of Elizabeth to the Restoration. New-York, 1908 (p. 213, 349...); and in L. Charlanne : *L'Influence Française en Angleterre au dix-septième siècle*. Paris, 1906 (I. p. 211, II. p. 110, 304).

29. Samuel Gee. *Abraham Cowley*, M. D. (*St Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*, 1903). — Hermann Ullrich. *Abraham Cowleys Leben und Schriften, im besonderen seine Abhandlung über eine zu gründende Akademie zur Förderung der Naturkenntnis*. Leipzig, 1902 (*Neue Jahrbücher für das Classische Altertum Geschichte und Deutsche Literatur und für Pädagogik*, vol. X, p. 224-238).

30. *Cowley and Agriculture*. By J. H. de Loach (*Science*, Feb. 1922).

31. Carson S. Duncan. *The New Science and English Literature in the Classical Period*. Chicago, 1913 (p. 35...).

32. *Science and English Prose style*. By R. E. Jones (*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, December 1930 (vol. XLV)).

obscurity into which he had fallen, and restore him to his rightful place. It was felt that, after being over-estimated in his time, he had been as much under-estimated of late years. This was most apparent in the appreciative criticism to which we are now coming. The movement that had originated about the close of the preceding period was now in full swing, and it may be said that the title of one of the many articles devoted to Cowley was truly symbolic : « Cowley redivivus »³³. After his long slumber in the dark, Cowley was born again to a new life and new appreciations.

His revival, from 1880 onwards, opened with a boom. For in 1881 A. B. Grosart issued his edition of Cowley's complete works, and his Memorial-Introduction vehemently claimed for Cowley the right to be remembered and admired, and taxed with incurable dullness those whose ears were not enraptured by the poet's strains. Though he did not endeavour to protect from all blame the *Pindaric odes*, or to revive the *Davideis* (in spite of their many beautiful flights), he discovered in *The Mistress* « genuine emotion, real passion, and the language of the heart », and made a gallant attempt to prove that the most extravagant conceits were transfigured by his amorous flame. Yet he set above all, as might be expected, the occasional poems and the *Anacreontics*. On the whole, the poems he distinguished as worth praising, or, to use his own phrase, « enduring », covered more than one half of Cowley's verse, a most generous allowance.

His analysis of Cowley's characteristics was not less enthusiastic. For he described in him deep and varied thoughts, a fertile imagination, strong emotional powers, complete originality reaching into « quaint oddity », even a « Wordsworthian seeingness towards Nature ». As to his prose, it was wonderful for its combination of « naturalness, artlessness, freshness, directness, wholesomeness... ». (Rather surprisingly, if one remembers Johnson's use of the word, Grosart protested against Cowley being called a « metaphysical » poet « so very slender is the extent of « metaphysic » in his poetry. »)

33. The article, itself of small value, was occasioned by A. C. Curtis's Selection (*Academy and Literature*, November 1. 1902 (vol. LXIII, p. 472)).

Nothing could be further from the overbearing enthusiasm of this account, than the careful discrimination observed by Edmund Gosse when defining Cowley's position in the seventeenth century. He insisted on his native genius, calling him « the only poet, indeed, of very high native merit between the romantic school and Dryden ». He showed how superior his gifts were « in the way of poetic rhetoric », and how he thereby inclined towards the school of Waller and Denham; but also how, his strong personality, preventing him from adhering completely to the neo-classical dogma, made him the poet of the transition : « he was with the classicists, yet not of them »³⁴. When he wrote the notice on Cowley for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he kept to the same lines as in his *Cornhill* article. The *Miscellanies* enclosed « his most vital pieces », there were in the *Pindaric odes* « weighty lines and passages buried in irregular and inharmonious masses of moral verbiage », so that, while only one or two were « good throughout », « a full posy of beauties may easily be culled from them ». He persisted in finding *The Mistress* « the least read of Cowley's works », « unendurable », because « the last and most violent expression of the amatory affectation of the seventeenth century », « a mere exhibition of literary callisthenics. » He gave Cowley a high position as a prose-writer, but only so :

As a poet, it is hardly possible that he can enjoy more than a very partial revival : the want of nature, the obvious and awkward art, the defective melody of his poems, destroy the interest that their ingenuity and occasional majesty would otherwise excite...³⁵.

In the same tone of discreet appreciation David Masson thought Cowley...

... really a man of genius, and a poet, though too much of his so-called poetry consisted less in poetry proper than in the subtle and ingenious intellection in metre which often passes for poetry³⁶.

34. *From Shakespeare to Pope. An Enquiry into the Causes and Phenomena of the Rise of Classical Poetry in England.* Cambridge, 1885 (p. 171-178).

35. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (The eleventh edition, 1910, vol. VII. p. 347-348).

36. *The Life of John Milton : narrated in connection with the political, ecclesiastical, and literary history of his time.* London, 1894 (vol. VI, p. 309). He praised the *Discourse* : « No one could match Cowley in this finely poeti-

There were resistances, however, and Cowley was severely treated by Leslie Stephen in the *Dictionary of National Biography*:

... Cowley can only be said to survive in the few pieces where he condescends to be unaffected, and especially in the prose of his *Essays*, which are among the earliest examples in the language of simple and graceful prose, with some charming poetry interspersed...³⁷.

Churton Collins similarly rejected his metaphysical efforts to praise his neo-classical tendencies :

... Cowley, at that time the most eminent poet in England, clung with inexplicable pertinacity to the vagaries of the school of Donne, except in his better moments... A rhetorician rather than a poet, without passion, without imagination, but rich in fancy and rich in thought, his style insensibly took its colour from the temper of his genius...³⁸.

H. C. Minchin, as editor of the *Essays*, could but emphasize their value. But he also examined his poetic titles to fame, and charged him with having led a fashion tainted by its original insincerity, with having preferred « ambiguity to directness and hair-splitting to simplicity ». For the rest, he thought the *Pindarics* metrically unfortunate, as Cowley « had not a good ear for rhythm, and without that a poet who ventures to create arbitrary measures is liable to lose his way », and he unhesitatingly denounced *The Mistress* : « he is at the worst in his love-verses, which were written quite perfunctorily »³⁹.

The general trend of criticism lay however towards a more tolerant benevolence even for Cowley's excesses. Grosart's estimate was echoed, in a more moderate form, by A. W. Fox, in 1899. Starting from the now familiar statement that Cowley was no longer read, he sought for the reason of this decay, and found it in his obscurity, not of thought, but of phrase. Yet he was worth knowing, for true poetry lay hidden behind the over-intricate front. In spite of « the far-fetched conceits, and extraordinary

cal style of anti-Cromwellian and anti-puritan invective » (VI, p. 339). But he looked down upon the *Cutter of Coleman Street* as « an absurd, ill-tempered thing, coarsely worded, and utterly unworthy of his genius » (VI, p. 358).

37. *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 1887 (vol. XII, p. 379-382).

38. *Essays and Studies*. By John Churton Collins. London, 1895 (p. 15, 16 : *Essay on Dryden*).

39. H. C. Minchin. *Cowley's last Testament* (*The Fortnightly Review*. April 1, 1904 (p. 572-582)).

digressions, long parentheses, and overcrowding of thoughts into a comparatively small space », an awful obstacle to indolent readers, the *Pindarics* revealed « a solemn grandeur of subtle yet sonorous rhythm ». Fox agreed with Grosart in his appreciation of *The Mistress* as betokening true love, a personal experience of passion. Of *The Change* he said that the opening lines were those « of one who had known what it was to love with no small degree of passion; and the pathetic, almost disdainful tone of the whole poem, speaks of passion unrequited and vain aspirations ». He condemned the *Davideis* as « on the whole prosaic », but this was his only severe judgment, for he praised the Latin poems as « scholarly, copious, and in most cases metrically exact », and the books of *Plants* as « a wonderful monument of the author's industry and a testimony of his accurate scholarship ». Owing to the *Essays* he deserved to be called « one of those authors who have laid the foundations of our prose deep in naturalness of expression and artless vigour of language ». A great poet, and a still greater thinker, he had become difficult reading for the Moderns because of his strained wit, and his luxuriant fancy. Strange to say, after stressing again and again the force and depth of his intellect, Fox refused to name Cowley a metaphysical poet, and only saw him as a « poet of fancy »⁴⁰.

When tracing the history of the English Lyric, F. E. Schelling enlarged upon the range and variety of his attempts, and stated that, thanks to « his excellent poetical gifts », he was almost completely successful in each »⁴¹. Van Doren thus accounted for Dryden's early admiration of Cowley :

... He was interested in everything. He took a naive delight in explanation, and loved to give account of things in verse. His mind was agile and airy, and worked with a certain dry animation that captivated the attention...⁴².

40. *A Book of Bachelors*. 1899. — It would hardly be necessary to mention Emma Yarnall's dissertation (*Abraham Cowley*. Berne, 1897), as it but reproduces known facts and judgments, were it not for the singularly apt choice made among the poems: *For* and *Against Hope*, the elegies on Crashaw, Hervey, Wotton, Van Dyke, the ode *To the Royal Society*, the hymn *To Light* the verses to Lord Falkland, *The Resurrection*, *The Muse*, *Upon Liberty* (p. 77).

41. *The English Lyric*. By F. E. Schelling... London, 1913 (p. 102).

42. Mark Van Doren. *The Poetry of John Dryden*, p. 26.

Courthope, while regretting the superabundant wit which led Cowley into the dangerous path of conceits, was willing to recognize his « fine fancy, vigorous understanding, and quick receptiveness », and admired his « masterly skill in adapting the metrical form which he employs for the moment to the matter in hand », even in *The Mistress*. He went as far as saying, indeed, that Cowley might have rivalled Pindar, had he been backed by his age :

No English poet ever possessed in a higher degree the power of bringing a grand abstract idea before the mind in a concrete form, by means of rich and splendid imagery,

but the pessimistic tone and intellectual temper then prevalent maimed his most inspired flights. The *Davideis* was, from its moral aim and literary ambitions, doomed to coldness; yet it contains beautiful descriptions, wonderful learning, and the heroic verse « displays all Cowley's vigorous command of idiomatic English, and his careful study of authors like Seneca and Lucan ». What Courthope preferred by far was his later verse, when Cowley freely followed upon the steps of the Ancients, and « his love for other men's rendering of his own sentiment inspires him... with the most delightful natural felicities of imagery »⁴³.

Some critics hesitated between the traditional choice among Cowley's works, and a feeling that even his metaphysical poetry might not be wholly bad, torn between their allegiance to the common ideas, and their own secret bent. J. M. Attenborough, for instance, attempted a definition of Cowley's originality, starting from *The Mistress* (which, by the way, he did not condemn so utterly as Gosse, while he stopped short of Grosart's excesses), and found it resided in his « dialectical suggestiveness », the best examples of it being the two poems *For* and *Against Hope*, where no truly great idea is to be discovered, but the perception of subtle resemblances, and the searching analysis of ideas and associated notions. Attenborough had thus reached a true comprehension of metaphysical wit, and seemed ready to welcome it. Yet, what he selected as the « enduring » poems of Cowley, were his elegies.

43. W. J. Courthope. *A History of English Poetry*. London, 1903 (vol. III, pp. 334-345).

The Complaint, the *Anacreontics*, the greater part of the *Miscellanies*, and the poems accompanying the *Essays*, nothing but what had been traditionally approved since the eighteenth century⁴⁴. This struggle, these hesitations may be witnessed in many of the articles of the time. It was often felt that something else might be liked in Cowley's poems than that part which had been so long admired. And the critics, while keeping to the old discriminative attitude, seemed to gain a broader appreciation of the poet.

Some comments offered on occasion of A. R. Waller's edition may serve to illustrate further the tendencies of Cowleyan criticism at this stage. G. C. Macaulay took up the old plea for the poet on account of his having suffered from the metaphysical vogue. Preceding writers had been too severe on him, he said, and, giving up *The Mistress*, from which Dr. Johnson had rightly drawn almost all his examples of metaphysical eccentricities, he endeavoured to rescue the *Pindaric odes* and the *Davideis*, as being « absurdly underrated ». He ultimately declared :

... Cowley in fact was a man of essentially wholesome tastes, with a natural tendency to simplicity and lucidity, who at a certain period contracted the vices of the so-called « metaphysical style », but almost wholly shook them off both in his verse and his prose before the end of his career. No other poet serves so well as a link between the first and second halves of the seventeenth century in English literature⁴⁵.

Mac Bryde, reviewing his fate, reached the same conclusion : Cowley was a better poet than many people realized. The *Davideis*, for example, was filled with a high moral purpose which made it worth reading⁴⁶. And M. Feuillerat thought him worth reviving, in spite of all his shortcomings :

... J'éprouve pour Cowley une tendresse moins enthousiaste, et j'hésiterais à endosser tous les éloges que certains critiques lui ont décernés; car il a eu, à mon sens, la plus détestable des qualités, la facilité. Mais il fut, de son vivant, un auteur à succès; longtemps après sa

44. J. M. Attenborough. *Essays and Selected Verse of Abraham Cowley*. 1915 (Introduction).

45. *Modern Language Review*. January 1906 (vol. I, p. 145). A second note by the same writer was published in January 1907 on the second volume of Waller's edition.

46. *A new edition of Cowley* (*Sewanee Review*, April 1906, p. 248-252).

mort il demeura une force agissante : à ce double titre, il vaut bien qu'on le ressuscite ⁴⁷.

As may be seen, everywhere, in the shortest notices as well as in longer analyses, the same opinions prevailed. And first, the historical point of view occupied, here also, a most important place ⁴⁸. Most critics dwelt on his importance as a writer of the transition. The point was emphasized in characteristic fashion in such works as E. Legouis's study of Cowley, the survey of the *Age of Milton* by J. H. B. Masterman, or the article Havelock Ellis wrote for *The New Statesman*.

Professor E. Legouis, in a series of lectures delivered in the Sorbonne, showed how Cowley's poetry, arising at first from the imitation of Spenser and the Elizabethan poets, later submitted through its most interesting achievements to the guidance of Donne, and finally evolved towards the more intellectual mood of the Restoration, tempering his « wit » with reason, and thus paving the way to Dryden and Pope ⁴⁹.

To J. H. B. Masterman Cowley was « a striking example of original genius breaking through the restraints of the traditional methods of his time ». For though, as a man, he was « deficient in strength and singleness of purpose », and though his poems betray this weakness, he stood as the first master in « the new style of prose-writing », clear, elegant, and brief at once ⁵⁰. H. D. Traill emphasized also the wavering of Cowley between the metaphysical and neo-classical styles : « He is as often of the old style as of the new » ⁵¹. W. Harvey-Jellie stressed Davenant's and Cowley's evolution from the romantic to the classical conception of art, towards 1650, though he confessed that Cowley's conversion had never been complete ⁵².

47. *Revue Germanique*. 1908, p. 488.

48. John Dennis even declared that Cowley belonged « to the history of English literature, but not to the roll of famous English poets ». *Heroes of Literature. English Poets...* London, 1893, p. 114.

49. *Revue Hebdomadaire des Cours et Conférences* : 8 février, 15 février, 29 février 1912 (*La Littérature anglaise au XVII^e siècle : Abraham Cowley*).

50. *The Age of Milton*. By the Rev. J. H. B. Masterman... London, 1897 (1909 ed., p. 234...).

51. H. D. Traill. *Social England. A Record of the progresses of the people in religion, laws, learning...* London, 1895 (vol. IV, p. 301-4).

52. *Les sources du théâtre anglais à l'époque de la Restauration*, par W. Harvey-Jellie. Paris, 1906 (p. 30-32).

Havelock Ellis devoted a whole article to a study of Cowley's life in the light of his historical importance. He first reviewed the sad fate the poet had suffered at the hands of critics and readers, showing how, since Johnson — « the last critic that dealt seriously with Cowley » —, he had been banished to the « aromatic by-paths » of anthologies — a statement which was true for the main portion of the nineteenth century, but had recently become less true —. Ellis then insisted on the all-important part played by Cowley in the transition :

He traversed the whole space between the English Renaissance and the English so-called Augustan Age, seeming an equal to the men of one world, and a king to the men of the other.

No influence was more active than his. As to his personality and life, the critic endeavoured to prove that, though the accidents Cowley met with prevented him from being as happy as he might have been, they perfectly equipped him for the mission he had to fulfil. His mind was ideally fitted to it. For if he lacked the passion and imagination of Donne, he needed above all « a bounding and flexible mind »; and if he lacked, on the other hand, the taste of his successors, « sensitive intelligence was needed for Cowley's task, more even than good taste ». His life was equally shaped as if to enable him to do a pre-ordained task : even to his exile in France and his misery there, but also his intercourse with French classicists, and later his fruitful retreat. In his poems, he brought not only « new form », but also « new material » for art in his images, and « new subjects ». And he never ceased making experiments in verse. Good and bad alike, his various attempts are « the work of an artist who is feeling his way into the paths of the future, and making mistakes which are as instructive as his successes ». To the objection that his « singularly alert and self-conscious intelligence » showed « less the spirit of poetry than of prose », Ellis answered that « it was an age of prose that was needed ». The Renaissance had carried poetry into all the aspects of life. The Restoration was to drive it out even of poems. And Cowley was, in this respect « a necessary pioneer ». In prose, he was not merely a pioneer, but a master, and he deserved to be called « the leader in the great succession of English essayists ».

Ellis gave the true reason for the discerning sympathy which

enlivens his essay when, explaining how Cowley carried English poetry through the wilderness that lay between the Renaissance and the modern world, he exclaimed :

To-day, when we are possibly passing through even such another wilderness between two worlds, we may feel a fresh interest in Cowley⁵³.

We shall find this feeling slowly growing and instilling a renewed life into criticisms of Cowley. But, to come back to what may be called the orthodox outlook, all the analyses we have been making show that, whereas the historical point of view was given a prominent place in estimates of Cowley, the actual value of his works was by no means forgotten. Indeed almost every critic felt called upon to deliver his opinion of them, and to classify them according to his own taste.

It can hardly be said these opinions brought any new development in the Cowley tradition. The choice made by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remained in its essentials that of the age of Johnson. The basis still was the opposition between Cowley's verse and his prose. Such a contrast was perceived that it seemed hardly possible to praise the latter without depreciating the former. A typical criticism in this respect was that of A. B. Gough, in the introduction to his selection of Cowley's prose. He determinedly discarded from the list of his readable works those which, being metaphysical, were most characteristic of him and of his age, and only retained those which appealed to the permanent poetic sense of readers, their feeling for outward beauty and their craving for emotions :

... When Cowley's poetry is charged with true emotion, as in the great elegy on Crashaw, or when he gives his fancy play and forgets his learning, as in the charming Anaereontic on a grasshopper, it can be still read with genuine delight, but often the modern reader finds his verse lacking in music, too forced and strained, too ready to mask its lack of spontaneous feeling by a parade of violent exaggerated rhetoric and pedantic learning...

53. *The New Statesman*. 12 July 1919 (vol. XIII, p. 369-371).

The prose was praised in proportion as the verse was blamed, for « it shows few traces of the characteristic vices of his verse », and there only we can « read and love the language of his heart » ⁵⁴.

It was generally agreed that the *Davideis*, in spite of occasional beauties, dragged too heavy a load of learning to be worth reading; and Cowley's heroic couplet had no great attraction to modern ears. It was even stated that « Cowley handled this measure less felicitously than he handled any other; the *Davideis* does not chime » ⁵⁵.

The *Pindarics* were violently attacked on the ground of their irregularity. But these unfavourable comments were no doubt partly due to the feeling that Cowley had failed in his attempt at playing the part of the English Pindar. As Van Doren wrote, he was thus called « more by courtesy than by desert, for he was mortally deficient in *afflatus*; his importance is that of a preceptor and experimentalist, not that of a creator ». And even so, his influence was on the whole harmful, his conception of the Pindaric ode being essentially anti-poetical: « he had written and taught others to write what metrically was nonsense » ⁵⁶. Though « dignified both in form and matter », and usually showing « intellect, imagination, and power », they remained, according to another critic, far below their model ⁵⁷. It was noticed that they embodied the most acute form of metaphysical poetry, at once its culmination and its incipient decay or, to use Van Doren's words,

the galvanic extravagance of individualism, already potential in Donne, and also the dissolution of organic poetic form, just as the conceits, and the abstract manner of his thought represent a similar extravagance and decay in poetic substance ⁵⁸.

54. Abraham Cowley. *The Essays and other prose Writings*. Edited by A. B. Gough. Oxford, 1915 (Introduction, p. xxiv...).

55. M. Van Doren. *The Poetry of John Dryden*, p. 92.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 242-244. — Cf. also E. Bliss Reed (*English Lyrical Poetry from its origins to the present time*. Yale Univ. Press., 1912, pp. 312-3): « Cowley never followed Pindar even afar off », having « cleverness and ingenuity of thought rather than imagination, and a gentle melancholy rather than deep emotion ».

57. *Poems of Abraham Cowley*. Selected and edited by Katherine B. Locock. London, 1903 (Introduction).

58. Cf. also F. Ives Carpenter *English Lyrical Poetry, 1500-1700*. London, 1897, p. 57.

The Mistress found as few supporters as the *Odes* — its coldness and artificial appearance being of course the main objection —. « It has little feeling, and its ingenuity of thought is not great enough to hold the flagging interest », asserted Reed, and Carl Holliday expressed the same view more strongly :

Cowley's is about the frostiest love-poetry in the English language, it gives forth a cold hard glitter that could not possibly attract any but an arctic belle...⁵⁹.

Mrs. Meynell called him « Cowley the cold » : « Cowley the cold wrote in a gay language, but contributed nothing to its gaiety »⁶⁰. Grosart and Fex could hardly hope to convince readers that his love was passionate, and Masterman was a solitary exception when he compared these poems to Shakespeare's sonnets⁶¹.

What ultimately remained from the mass of his verse, was the slender collection of occasional verses he published in 1656 as *Miscellanies*, to which were added the poems accompanying the *Essays*, and one or two pieces from the 1663 *Verses written upon severall Occasions*. The *Anacreontics*, and the two elegies on Hervey and Crashaw won universal praise, the former inviting comparison with *Lycidas* and *Thyrsis*⁶². The ode *Of Wit* was pointed out as a fine example of the new poetry then a-forming, « aptness of phrase and colloquial grace » taking the place of « the sheer lyric note » of the Elizabethan age⁶³. Now the ode *Upon Liberty* and the address to Evelyn in *The Garden* were held the best, now the hymn *To Light* was given the palm as « a striking illustration of a world of delight and aesthetic feeling from which the Puritan stood alike by principle and sympathy altogether excluded »⁶⁴. But anthologies, as well as critical comments show how restricted a range his poems enjoyed.

59. Cf. E. B. Reed, *op. cit.*, and Carl Holliday. *The Caroline Poets*, 1911 (p. 132-151).

60. In the article of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 28. 1897, headed : *The Wares of Autolykus*.

61. J. H. B. Masterman. *The Age of Milton*, p. 132.

62. Cf. Reed, *op. cit.*, p. 314, and also Mary Lloyd (*Elegies, Ancient and Modern*... London, 1903, p. 94).

63. Ernest Rhys. *Lyric Poetry*. London, 1913, p. 236.

64. J. Bass Mullinger's introduction to J. H. B. Masterman's *Age of Milton*, p. xx.

As a prose-writer, on the contrary, and especially as an essayist, he came triumphantly to the front, and was universally applauded. It was the chief merit of the period to perceive his talent, and to establish his claims to immortality by setting his *Essays* as one of the classics of English prose. As Edmund Gosse said:

Cowley, who first understood what Montaigne was bent on introducing, is a pure essayist, and leads on directly to Steele and Addison, and to Charles Lamb. If we read Cowley's chapter *On Myself*, we find contained in it, as in a nutshell, the complete model and type of what an essay should be, elegant, fresh, confidential, and constructed with as much care as a sonnet⁶⁵.

Orlo Williams insisted on his workmanship, and the sincerity which makes us feel so near him when reading these *Essays*:

In their own mood, not only for their limpid music and their happy snatches of verse, but for their author's plain preoccupation with nothing but his own art, his own taste, and his own experience, these discourses have not been surpassed... There is a tenderness of personal reminiscence and analysis, in particular, in his *Essay Of Myself*, which cries to our own age across the formal objectivity of the eighteenth century...⁶⁶.

This feeling of intimacy with Cowley, the consciousness of penetrating into his secret soul, was assuredly the determining criterion for the choice thus made among Cowley's works, either in verse or in prose.

Save for a few who, alive to the wealth and dignity of his thought, relished such poems as the ode *To the Royal Society*, or the ode *Of Wit*, the great majority of readers felt almost exclusively attracted by those of Cowley's works which bore the mark of a confession, through which they could catch a glimpse of his true character. His sincerity became an essential element of his fame, and even *The Mistress* might have been forgiven its baroque setting, had it looked like the outburst of a passionate love.

65. *Books on the Table*. London, 1921, p. 105. Cf. also H. C. Minchin's preface to his selection of Cowley's prose, 1904 (p. xxxiv).

66. *The Essay*. London, 1915, p. 28...

His comedies were also discussed — not unfavourably — and set among the talented productions of the seventeenth century stage (Cf. Homer Smith, W. W. Greg, and G. C. Moore-Smith).

It does not seem exaggerated to say that the period we are now studying has chiefly revived Cowley — in its initial stage, at least — on sentimental or artistic grounds. The elegies on Hervey and Crashaw, the delicate spontaneity of the *Essays*, satisfied its emotional requirements, and the sprightly grace of the *Anacreontics* and of *The Chronicle* appealed to its aesthetic sense. And there lies perhaps the reason why Cowley was still cried down as a « metaphysical » poet, though the period seemed in the right mood to welcome him as such. The state of transition and turmoil which has been alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, with its train of anxious, restless endeavours to find suitable outlets for its energies and a satisfactory solving of the problems it faced, might well give to the age features apparently identical with those of the metaphysical era.

But the trouble in each period was due to different causes, and each was bound for opposite goals. Both were reactions; but while the generation of Donne, and later that of Cowley, reacted (with varying success) against the emotional and imaginative excesses of the Renaissance, a romantic mood, the late Victorians and the Edwardians stood up against the tyranny of an age which was at heart scientific, rational, in a word, classical. While the first were longing for the establishment of a scientific, rational order, where all illogical impulses would be mastered by universally accepted rules, and pure intellect would reign supreme, the others were shaking off the heavy chains of conventions, struggling against every restraint and even law, to gain a complete liberty of the individual and give free play to all the spontaneous springs in the human mind, heart, or senses.

There, disorder was shaping itself into order. Here, law was being dissolved into anarchy. In both cases, an intermediate stage had been reached, bearing the same outward features, in which neither order nor disorder, neither law nor anarchy, could be said to exist. And truly intellect and sentiment were mixed and present in both. Donne was as passionate as he was intellectual, and even Cowley was not without some sparks of the old immoderate enthusiasm. Much intellectualism was preserved in the modern period, even when most desirous of following instinct and intuition as its only guides.

But the aims pursued being exactly opposite, no true sympathy

could spring out of this chance meeting at the cross-roads. So voluntarily intellectual a poetry as Cowley's could not be appreciated by men who, consciously or not, were ruled by contrary ideals. These ideals must be altered, and reason at least partly reinstated in its former eminence, to make such an appreciation possible.

In the second and third decades of the present century, the needed change has apparently taken place, for, coming close upon the judgments we have reviewed, and often mingled with them, a new form of interest in Cowley has been evolved : and some critics have been focussing their attention on his metaphysical achievements.

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As was indeed inevitable, after the first vehement anti-intellectual and anti-rational outbursts, the pendulum swung in the opposite direction, towards moderation and calm. The intellectual elements which had survived even while momentarily depressed, reasserted themselves, and successfully vindicated their right to exist, side by side with emotional and imaginative activities. A complex and fragile balance was established, in which contraries might, at least for a time, co-exist. Now the moment had come when metaphysical poetry could be understood and admired. For the compromise thus reached was very close to that through which Donne and Cowley had fought their way. After a lapse of two centuries, the laws of historical revolution had brought back the same mood. It is not surprising therefore to find in various critical works of the last twenty years, gaining steadily in strength and consciousness, a progressive liking for metaphysical poets. And this change marks a second stage in the revival of Cowley : after his occasional verse and his prose, his loftier verse was to be seriously considered.

It had grown customary to dismiss metaphysical poets summarily, in a few contemptuous phrases. Leslie Stephen pinned them down as « courtier pedants » :

They represent the intrusion into poetry of the love of dialectical subtlety encouraged by the still prevalent system of scholastic disputation ⁶⁷.

67. Article on Cowley in the *D. N. B.*, vol. XII.

Some could not help admiring « wit », but hated it. Thus John Dennis on Donne : « If he is still admired by competent readers, the admiration is not always due to delight »⁶⁸. F. I. Carpenter was content to define it as « far-fetched, abstract, intellectualized »⁶⁹. A. H. Upham spoke of « the bold unmeaning extravagance » of the school, and stated that in Cowley and Crashaw, « the conceits or vagaries of thought and expression had become ends in themselves »⁷⁰.

These survivals of the old hostility towards the metaphysical poets grew scarce as time passed, and a keen desire to understand them aright replaced it. Professor R. M. Alden devoted much care to an analysis of the central figure of their poetry, the conceit, tracing it from its Elizabethan sources, through its culmination in Donne, to its later uses in Carew and Cowley. To him, Cowley represented a weakening of the metaphysical spirit, for while Donne was passionately serious in handling the conceit, he but played with it and turned it into « a key to endless new-old combinations of lyric wit, a merry jugglery of fancy... »⁷¹.

H. J. Massingham proved alive to the interest metaphysical poetry offered to modern readers. He pointed out the gulf that separated seventeenth century poetry from that of the Renaissance, and also how near ours it stood :

... The song has become a poem... material joy, spiritual search... acceptance, complex doubt... exuberance, pessimism... sensuous and transparent spontaneity, a conflict of intellectual vision... The broken, fragmentary idealism of the seventeenth century is more to us than the frank materialism of the eighteenth... They too lived under the shadow of corruption and disintegration, and their poetry as well as ours feels, fears, and runs from the darkness... like ours, their poems are experimental in rhythm, rapidly transitional in effort, and uncertain in technique⁷².

68. John Dennis. *English Lyrics from Spenser to Milton*. London, 1898 (Introduction, p. xii).

69. F. I. Carpenter. *English Lyrical Poetry...* 1897, p. 57.

70. *The Typical Forms of English Literature...* By A. H. Upham. Oxford University Press (American branch), 1917, p. 52.

71. *The Lyrical conceits of the Elizabethans* (*Studies in Philology*, 1917, vol. XIV, p. 129-152); and *The Lyrical conceits of the « metaphysical poets »* (*Modern Philology*, 1920, vol. XVII, p. 183-198).

72. *A Treasury of Seventeenth Century Verse. From the death of Shakespeare to the Restoration. 1616-1660*. London, 1919 (Introduction, p. xv-xxii).

And yet, in spite of such knowing sympathy with the principles of the school, he spoke of Cowley according to the old notions, as if his poetry, in the very extracts he chose to publish, was a dead letter to him :

... Cowley's bad fault is to pile up damp verbal brushwood to light a naturally phlegmatic temper. By himself he is an easy, talkative, inventive poet, but in the platform manner, he is rather tiresome. He can never forget he has to live up to himself, — and most unhappily to Donne —. He is no hand at metaphysical subtleties, and a good deal of his mystical verse reminds one of a glass chandelier : his profuse words tinkling together like the crystals. At his best he is fresh, comely, witty... ⁷³.

As early as 1912 his place and true originality were accurately defined by Professor E. Legouis. Though Cowley wrote charming occasional verse, pathetic, tender, and familiar in turn, though he endeavoured — not quite unsuccessfully — to reach the sublime through his *Davideis* and his *Pindaric odes*, his distinctive feature was elsewhere, in his « wit », in the mixture of subtlety and reasoning, in the intellectual display of ingenuity which sounded its characteristic note in such strangely alluring poems as *For Hope* and *Against Hope* ⁷⁴.

When H. J. C. Grierson surveyed, in 1906, the first half of the seventeenth century, he skilfully unravelled the complex tissue of Donne's mind and temper, showing him to be an Elizabethan through his « emancipated ardour and exaltation », and yet reacting against « the diffuse and flamboyant style of the Spenserian and Italianate poets », clothing his thought, « for the sake of pregnancy and vigour », in his knowledge of medieval divinity and science. He relished the strange blending in his verse of intellectual and abstract elements with vivid, often fierce, passion. He further showed Cowley's poetical superiority to Waller, and his departure from Donne, for his wit, to him, was

... as metaphysical, as pedantic and fantastical as Donne's, but he has neither the emancipated imaginative ardour of the Renaissance,

⁷³. *Ibid.*, p. 330, note.

⁷⁴. *Revue hebdomadaire des Cours et Conférences*, 1912, p. 748-753. Cf. also the illuminating summary of Cowley's poetical achievements in the *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*, par E. Legouis et L. Cazamian. Paris, 1924 (p. 550-553).

nor the devotional and ecstatic tone of the catholic reaction, but the alert, inquisitive rational temper of Dryden and the epoch of the Royal Society.

And the parts of his works he exalted above the rest were those in which Cowley appeared as a forerunner of Dryden much more than when he set up as Donne's disciple ⁷⁵.

When he collected an anthology of metaphysical verse, in 1921, Grierson again analysed the intellectual character of these poets, the fine psychology « of which their conceits are often the expression », their « learned imagery », « the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics », and above all « the peculiar blend of passion and thought ». He then differentiated Cowley's wit from Donne's. While Donne was « familiar with the definitions and distinctions of mediaeval scholasticism », Cowley was attracted « by the achievements of science and the systematic materialism of Hobbes ». Cowley had a right to be called « metaphysical », but he represented the last moments of this literary mood : less extravagant than Donne, he possessed less « central heat », less passion, less imagination :

... The long wrestle between reason and the imagination has ended in the victory of reason over good sense. The subtleties of the schoolmen have for Cowley none of the significance and interest they possessed for Donne... The fashion of metaphysical wit remains... when the spirit that gave it colour and music is gone... ⁷⁶.

The force of this impulse towards a clearer recognition of metaphysical poetry as a poetical unit was exemplified in an essay on metaphysical poetry, by E. Gosse. Gosse had previously condemned the very notion of this school as utter extravagance. Now, with the zeal of a convert, he discovered a wonderful unity of purpose in all its members, from Donne to Cowley, this purpose being « an application of the psychological method to the passions », and discovering « uncharted provinces in the soul of man ».

... The poet, tired of pastoral superficialities, looked deeply into his

75. *The First Half of the Seventeenth Century*. Edinburgh, 1906 (p. 153, 189, 190...). He disliked *The Mistress* and the *Davideis* as much as Gosse. He liked best the elegies on Crashaw and Hervey.

76. H. J. C. Grierson. *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century. Donne to Butler*, 1921 (Introduction, p. xiv... lvi...).

own soul, and found himself in possession of certain data, which he produced... in terms of the imagination. He illustrated these spiritual phenomena, and endeavoured to make them intelligible and tangible by calling to illustration images drawn from common experience ⁷⁷.

Most captivating in his comprehension of the metaphysical poets, because a poet himself, and near to them, was T. S. Eliot. He defined his views in striking phrases. He showed these poets engaged, much like the modern symbolists, « in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalents for states of mind and feeling ». The divorce of intellect and sensibility (for which he held Dryden and Milton responsible) was not yet accomplished, and « a thought to Donne was an experience »; wit was « a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace » ⁷⁸. The critic's interest was obviously centred upon Donne. The wealth of his intellect, the boldness of his conceits, and above all the intense individuality which transfigures his most extravagant figures, attracted him much more than the more reasonable and self-contained Cowley. Indeed, Cowley meant to him the extreme limits of metaphysical poetry, metaphysical only in appearance. All the features that were to be found in Donne also existed in Cowley, but toned down, reduced in size and depth. The conceit was deprived of its emotional contents, the body remained but the soul had fled ⁷⁹.

Similarly, when Mario Praz analysed metaphysical poetry, he devoted his exclusive attention to Donne and Crashaw. To him, the essence of Donne's poetry, even more than his wit, was the argumentative, ratiocinative evolution of his poems ⁸⁰.

77. *More Books on the Table*. London, 1923 (pp. 307-313). — Cf. also Ben C. Clough, in the *Modern Language Notes* (January 1923, vol. XXXVIII, p. 47-55), for a definition of the metaphysical poets; — and H. W. Wells (*Poetic Imagery illustrated from Elizabethan Literature*. Columbia, 1924), for a definition of « radical images », as used by Donne and Cowley. — A. H. Nethercot made clear the origins and the use of the word « metaphysical » as applied to poetry (*The Term Metaphysical Poets before Johnson*. *Modern Language Notes*, 1922 (vol. XXXVII, p. 11-17).

78. *Homage to Dryden*. London, 1924. Essay II. *The metaphysical poets*, p. 30, and *Andrew Marvell*, p. 35...

79. T. S. Eliot delivered in 1925 a course of lectures on the Metaphysical poets (Clarke Lectures, read in Trinity College, Cambridge), dealing with Donne, Crashaw and Cowley, from which the present writer has derived much profit.

80. *Seicentismo e Marinismo in Inghilterra*. Firenze, 1926. Cf. specially, p. 92, ff..., and a full review of the book in *The Review of English Studies*, 1926, by H. J. C. Grierson.

In 1926 John Sparrow published a selection of Cowley's verse, in which he chose *The Mistress* as the centre, a development that Bishop Hurd, and Dr. Johnson, or, for that matter, many a modern critic, would never have thought possible. And this was done out of a conscious feeling of kinship with the metaphysical mood. Does not Sparrow declare in his introduction :

... Metaphysical poetry has had a varied history : after abuse in the eighteenth and neglect in the nineteenth century, it has returned to something like its ancient popularity ?

He claimed for Cowley's poetry a much greater degree of praise than it had received since neo-classical criticism had exposed his faults, for those very parts of his work which had been most vehemently censured :

... When Cowley is most a poet he is often genuinely metaphysical... Where he feels deeply he is inquisitive about his own emotions; in those love-poems which seem the recollection of an unfeigned passion, passion seems to have bred reflection, so that one may say his « body thinks »; when he is in earnest he deals with the strange conflicts and the stranger alliances of thought and feeling.

Thus at length the essence of Cowley's metaphysical verse was duly perceived and praised. Yet, when Sparrow came to choose the best among his poems, those which may be called « great poetry », or « pure poetry », he had to fall back on the least metaphysical poems, such as *The Chronicle*, the *Anacreontics*, or the verse *Essays* and the translations, thus showing how true was J. Dennis's assertion that admiration might not always be linked with delight ⁸¹.

The reviewer of Sparrow's book in the *Times' Literary Supplement* most aptly defined the new interest with which Cowley was now viewed. After stating that his position was « respectable » : « if he has few adherents, he has fewer detractors », he showed him to be the most representative among the metaphysical poets, but not the most popular. For though the atmosphere of the present age is very near that of the mid-seventeenth century, it is better pleased with the mysticism of Crashaw or « the agonizing

81. J. Sparrow. *The Mistress. With other Select Poems of Abraham Cowley*. London, 1926 (The Nonesuch Press). Introduction.

battle with self unendingly waged in Donne... »; « Cowley himself is not sharp enough for its taste ». Readers of 1926, however, were, to the reviewer's mind, better able to appreciate him than Gosse in 1875, and *The Mistress* would not be charged now as then with being « the most unreadable production of its author ». We have grown used to « the Caroline convention » and Cowley's best work is now considered to be that which he wrote under the influence of Donne : *The Mistress* and the *Miscellanies*. In *The Mistress*, whether he truly sang his love or imagined it, he has faced problems which are real, and added something new to that eternal theme. Hardly to be called a « pure poet », he cannot be denied great power of thought, and therein for us resides his truest value⁸².

More recently still, G. Williamson has brought new light on Cowley's discipleship to Donne, analysing his thought and art so as to bring out what he derived from his master, and what was his own. What Cowley borrowed from Donne was his skill in analysis, his talent for lyric argument, his indifferent use of homely or abstruse words and figures. The two poets were, however, most different :

... A comparison of the conceit in Cowley with that of Donne reveals the different talents of the two poets pretty clearly; the plangency and dark emotion of Donne's conceit contrast sharply with the dry point and gay malice of Cowley's...

In this « dry bouquet of gay malice » lay, according to Williamson, Cowley's metaphysical originality.

... The intensity of Donne is passing away in Cowley, and the long struggle between reason and imagination is coming to a close in the victory of reason and good sense...⁸³.

This is the last note of criticism upon Cowley : one of deep comprehension and sympathy, though without undue admiration, and rather with the regret of being unable to admire him more. For just as he stood, during the eighteenth century, in the shadow of

82. *Times' Literary Supplement*, November. 18, 1926 : *Cowley's Lyrics*.

83. George Williamson. *The Donne Tradition. A Study in English Poetry from Donne to the death of Cowley*. Harvard University Press, 1930. Chapter VII : *The Chief Offenders* (Cleveland, Benlowes, Cowley).

Waller and Dryden, Cowley now stands in the shadow of Donne.

In Donne, the first wave of metaphysical poetry shone brightest, dazzling in substance as well as most extravagant in form. An intense individualism pervaded every one of his lines, and imbued his wildest conceits with the glamour of passion. His intellect, for all its nimbleness, was fused with fervid imagination and sensuality, and led him towards strange riddles which leave modern readers guessing. By these, he was hailed with wonder. The stirring confessions of his struggles, combining with the intellectual obscurity in which they were clothed, won him devout admirers.

Not so with Cowley. While the true disciple of Donne in his mind, he had acquired the classical temper : he had grown calm and reasonable, and metaphysical verse lost with him much of its alluring strangeness. Passion had almost entirely vanished, and its mysterious glow had been replaced by the steady, prosaic light of reason. He deprived the reader of the pleasure of doubt, and never taxed his divining powers as Donne had done : he flattered him less, allowing him to perceive at once the solid, logical foundations of his thought. He was therefore held weaker and duller than his master. Though he spoke the same language, everything he uttered sounded thinner and more artificial. Extravagance became unpardonable as it grew cold and looked premeditated. As one of his critics said, there was in him « too much intellect and not enough of rich red blood »⁸⁴. And this is the reason why, though the present age has given birth to poets who have as much right to be termed « metaphysical » as our seventeenth century writers, we cannot detect any trace of an influence of Cowley in their verse. When reading T. S. Eliot's lines, we may here and there be reminded of Donne, but never of Cowley. The latter could no longer, in fact, be a source of inspiration. The admixture of classical elements into his metaphysical verse hampers him now, as in old days his metaphysical qualities had ruined him in the eyes of his judges.

Yet if second to Donne, if often ranked beneath Crashaw or Marvell as an artist, he was given an honourable place among the metaphysical poets, and was studied for his own sake by the cri-

84. Carl Holliday. *The Cavalier Poets*. London, 1911.

tics of the school. His « wit » was once more recognized as his distinctive feature, and his more ambitious poems regained some of the admiration they had once roused. They were no longer discarded in an off-hand manner, and were thought worthy of a close investigation.

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This last period in the history of Cowley's reputation has been most important, and actually most beneficial to him. It may be hoped indeed that the era of upheavals and fluctuations has now reached its close. Exhaustive research has established his claims on a firm ground. On one hand, his historical importance as a traditional writer has been fully revealed, and, were it only as a literary landmark, his works are sure to live on. But Cowley stands for more than such a symbol, and the body of his verse and prose affords many proofs of a talent which can in no case be neglected. H. J. C. Grierson recently emphasized the necessity of not thinking of him merely as a disciple of Donne or a forerunner of Dryden :

... To appreciate Cowley one must resist the temptation to compare him with Donne on the one hand, and Dryden on the other, and admire the real virtuosity of his witty poems and the varied rhetoric of his odes and addresses, and even of his tedious epic paraphrase of Old Testament history⁸⁵.

And A. H. Nethercot plainly declared :

Cowley is more interesting as an individual, as a personality, than as a representative « Metaphysical » writer⁸⁶.

So that, while, as a « metaphysical » poet, he has been restored to as high a place as he could ever hope to reach again, through his occasional verse and his prose he has won an honourable seat among — to use the Rev. A. B. Grosart's phrase — « the worthies of England ».

85. H. J. C. Grierson. *Cross-Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century; or, The World, The Flesh, and the Spirit, their actions and reactions*. London, 1929. Grierson reverted to the opinion that « Cowley's temper is more attractive than his art », and considered him as the type of the sweet humanist, as opposed to the puritan sectarian. (p. 305).

86. Abraham Cowley. *The Muse's Hannibal*. Oxford. 1931. p. 289.

CONCLUSION

In following the evolution of Cowley's reputation through its successive stages, we have endeavoured to solve a twofold problem : first who were Cowley's readers, and how far did the knowledge of his works extend ? Secondly, why did they read them, and what did they like best ? It now remains to pick up the threads of our enquiry, and answer these questions. The answer to both is but one. Whether we consider the number of his readers or the extent to which his works were read, his reputation has, ever since the end of the seventeenth century, and until recent years, steadily gone down. The history of literature offers few instances of men so well-known and so admired at one time, so ill-known or criticized at another. No more deplorable calamity could befall an author whose sole aim was « to be for ever known ».

I

The story of his reputation had opened most auspiciously. He had known fame when living, and until the end of the century he was hailed as one of the best poets, if not the best poet, England could then boast. The run of editions his works enjoyed bore witness to the depth of the public enthusiasm. Every person with a literary bent must read them, every writer must praise them. The poets looked up to him, and chose him as their master and leader. Dryden himself submitted at first to his guidance. He launched the Pindaric ode on its triumphant, if deplorable, career. He truly deserved to be called a poet's poet.

Yet, even then his glorious course was being checked, and the

victory of the neo-classical doctrine, as it became complete, led to his progressive abandonment. The decay was slow, however, much slower than could have been expected, and gave evidence of his hold upon the public. For whereas other metaphysical poets had been all but forgotten, and at any rate severely criticized ever since the Restoration, an edition of his works was published as late as 1721. His admirers continued numerous, and he found against the attacks of critics, among the critics themselves, many staunch defenders. By 1750, though his friends, among whom Richardson stood foremost, deplored the unjust neglect he suffered, and though he was no longer called « incomparable Mr. Cowley », he nevertheless remained « the great Cowley », one of the most celebrated names on the roll of English poets.

The second half of the eighteenth century brought about a more thorough depreciation of his fortunes. For he fell into the hands of doctrinaires only too prone to condemn him in the name of the rules. Dr. Johnson's *Life* furnished however ample evidence as to his merit and the fame he still enjoyed, and it must not be thought, indeed, that he found readers no longer. The success of Bishop Hurd's selection proved that there were still many men eager to know him better. But it also proved to what extent his reading public had dwindled. The generality had left him for good: he was no longer a popular author. He remained the favourite of cultivated men, and more precisely, on account of his sober and moral verse, of clergymen. He might then be termed a gentleman's poet, almost a critic's poet. He had retreated to an honourable seat in the second rank of writers.

From this humble station, the nineteenth century did not rescue him for a long time. At first, on the contrary, he sank deeper than ever. He became « old Cowley », little more than a name to most, save for a few men of extensive, out of the way learning, like Charles Lamb, or Sir Egerton Brydges. The Romantic age took hardly any notice of him, and the following period was openly indifferent. He only survived in the memory of the Victorians as the author of a few minor poems scattered in anthologies. Only

« competent readers », that is, professional students of literature, knew him at all extensively.

Then came, in the last quarter of the century, a happy change. Numerous editions and articles brought him again to the notice of the public, and the revival of his fame among critics has, of course, led to an increase in the number of readers. It may be doubted, however, if he has gained many outside the circle of University men. For he was revived as much, if not more, for the historical interest he offered, as for his intrinsic merits : becoming a sign, a symbol, and, to some extent, deprived of personal value.

Grosart claimed that he ever had, and ever would have, an inner circle of readers. He fully deserves it, and has it. But we must not swell this revival into a triumph. It is strictly limited, and it may be wondered if the appeal he makes to modern minds is strong enough to defeat, even for a few hours, the tyranny of an age in which leisure grows scarce. Classical purity and attic grace they will find nearer to them than in his *Anacreontics*, romantic lyricism they will not dream of looking for in his verse. And if they relish the metaphysical ingenuity of thought and phrase, they will rather go to Donne, his master, than to him. Only as a prose-writer can he raise his voice and be listened to with delight. But even then, how many readers, nowadays, will, of their own accord, open a volume of Cowley's ?

II

Just as he was read by a steadily lessening number of readers, the bulk of his works that attracted notice grew smaller as time passed. At first, his whole poetical works were enthusiastically accepted. Was he not the Virgil, the Pindar, the Horace of English poetry ? He towered above Spenser as an epic poet, and his *Davidis* sustained comparison with the *Eneid*. His *Pindaric odes* set a matchless pattern to those who aimed at expressing their raptures in undying verse. *The Mistress* was, with the *Sacharissa* poems, the universally accepted guide for all would-be martyrs in Love.

Cowley's fame, immediately after his death, mainly rested on these three works, for he was almost exclusively admired as a

metaphysical poet. His unbounded wealth of imagery and ingenuity of thought filled his contemporaries with wonder and delight. Far into the eighteenth century, even after Addison's damaging attack, and Pope's hints, he continued being commended for his « wit ».

Neo-classical doctrines effected an almost complete overthrow of this verdict. Dryden had already drawn attention to the danger of his obtruding ingenuity, Addison denounced his « mixt wit », Oldmixon his « wrong-thinking », so that Cowley as a metaphysical poet gradually ceased to live, save to attract censure. The *Davideis* died, as it were, a natural death. Practically unattacked until the end of the eighteenth century, it was already, by then, nothing but a corpse. And nobody, not even Dr. Grosart, has attempted to revive it. The neo-classical attack was, in fact, focused on *The Mistress*. All the critics of the school inveighed against its coldness and artificiality. Dr. Johnson derived from it almost all his examples of metaphysical excesses. The *Odes* were allowed to live longer. So great was their vogue, so numerous were their imitators, that they still kept popular towards 1750. In truth Congreve and Addison had condemned the imitations, but not the original. It was not until Gilbert West published his translation of Pindar, in 1749, and Thomas Gray his *Odes*, that people realized how much they had been led astray by Cowley, and began to forsake him. Irregular odes were still being written, in spite of repeated condemnations, in the middle of the nineteenth century, but Cowley as a model had long been forgotten, and his odes were hardly ever mentioned but to be jeered at.

Thus was Cowley's metaphysical poetry utterly blamed by the eighteenth century. His intellectual powers, though Dr. Johnson noticed them with praise, could hardly be accepted, clothed as they were in their extravagant garb, by the age of reason and self-command. In his stead, there rose a new Cowley, hardly known to his own contemporaries, a sweet Anacreontic singer, a simple, graceful lyric poet, and also an excellent prose-writer, the author of moral essays filled with true sensibility, and instinct with the charms of unassuming virtue. His occasional verse, together with the *Essays*, emerged from the obscurity in which they had been hidden since their birth, and revealed in Cowley qualities which

might ensure him a lasting fame. For there lay the universal part, as it were, of his works, the least characteristic no doubt of his time, and perhaps of himself — that is, of the part he wanted to play —, but easily accessible to every person who cared for the spontaneous outcome of real talent. Strange to say, apart from the *Anacreontics* and *The Chronicle*, classical in spirit, his works were extolled by the neo-classicists for unclassical reasons, for their marks of melancholy and sensibility, and for the confession of the *Essays*. But as was proved by Pope's and Hurd's criticism, there was no opposition between the classical strictness for form, and the tendency to welcome romanticism in thoughts.

The result of the neo-classical choice thus proved not only a reversal of opinion concerning his writings, but also a careful parting of their permanent from their ephemeral elements, and the Herringman folio had been condensed and purified into Hurd's two small octavos. The sentence passed on Cowley was assuredly too severe. He suffered through the indiscretion of his very admirers, and when the reaction set in, critics were the more disposed to censure as the praise had previously been too loud. The selection made by the age of Johnson may be considered as a minimum selection.

The nineteenth century first corroborated this judgment almost without any change. In spite of occasional recognitions of his originality, the critics always fell back on his lighter verse, and selected, together with the *Anacreontics* and *The Chronicle*, such poems as the elegies on Hervey and Crashaw, or the verses printed with the *Essays*, among which the odes *Upon Liberty*, and *The Garden* stood foremost.

The last quarter of the century set to work to revise this verdict, and Cowley's works entered upon a more favourable course. The revival was marked by two distinct stages. As a poet, Cowley was originally left much as he was found : his light verse alone being favourable known. But his prose gained ground, until he rose to the dignity of an English classic. Not only the essayist, but the critic, the pamphleteer, and even the dramatist obtained full recognition. And Cowley's fame, to-day, rests upon no truer foundation than on these *Essays* which he had written as a pastime in his Surrey retreat, and in which, rivalling Montaigne, he proved

the worthy ancestor of Addison and Lamb. But the body of his writings now accepted to ensure his permanent claim to fame was still no larger than that allowed by eighteenth century critics. And indeed, the reasons for this partial revival were almost identical with those that had already been expressed by Pope and Hurd. Cowley was favoured merely on artistic and sentimental grounds. His thought was still neglected.

Then an attempt was made to revive the metaphysical poet, culminating in Grierson's and Sparrow's selections. Cowley's ingenuity, the suggestive power of his conceits, have thus been brought to light. His claim to a place among the greater poets has been seriously considered by a criticism alive to intellectual merit.

It seems, then, that the present time witnesses a widening of the scope allowed to Cowley's genius. For the first time in two centuries his true originality, at least the originality he himself sought after, has been perceived and welcomed. « Wit » has come to be recognized as his most distinctive feature. But while the other non-metaphysical, or less metaphysical, poems, have endured the test of time, and contain those elements which make poetry universally acceptable, a simple clear thought clothed in harmonious lines, the offspring of his wit seems doomed to fluctuate for ever, now praised, now damned, according as the temper of the ages varies. For these « witty » poems are indeed anomalous, making a narrowly limited appeal to the reader, requiring a strange predisposition to be understood, and to any degree relished. We have apparently reached one of these favourable moments. But how long will this one last ? When will the next one occur ?

Cowley relied on his metaphysical poems to give him fame. But, by exclusively courting the tastes of his contemporaries, they turn out to be the most unsafe of all his literary efforts. So that he offers the odd peculiarity of being ultimately famous for the very parts of his works which, had he been asked, he would have first rejected. He may be said to have won fame in spite of himself.

Even at the lowest ebb of his reputation he was acknowledged as a true, if minor poet, and a great prose-writer. His works were never wholly neglected. It may therefore be confidently stated that

he will live in the memory of men, not merely because he stands as a significant landmark on the map of English seventeenth century literature, but also on account of his positive contribution to the treasure of the age. His prose ranks as one of the best models : it has absolute merit, and no one will deny him the title of one of the first essayists, in worth as well as in time. His verse, save for the small body that accompanies the prose in its simple, good-natured grace, depends on the reader's mood, and appeals but to a few. For it is difficult reading : stimulating, indeed, but its strange wealth can only be mastered after a struggle. It is, too, disturbing reading. For it impresses one, ever and again, with the uncomfortable feeling that genius lurks behind it, flashing out in places, but maimed, wasted, by opposite forces. It seems as if Cowley could never express himself fully, hampered by a distressful discord between what he wanted to say, and the manner in which he wanted to say it.

And therein lies, perhaps, the true explanation of the overwhelming ascendancy he gained over his contemporaries, as well as of the severity of the later generations. Cowley the man was superior to Cowley the poet. Those who approached him and enjoyed his company, could not withstand his power of attraction. They relished his writings so fully because they were possessed of their true meaning by the knowledge they had of his soul. For over thirty years after his death, the seduction of his personality cast a spell over his readers. To read him then was to love him. As time passed, this charm dissolved, and Cowley could only be known by his written word. He was henceforth the more severely judged as it only offered a broken, imperfect reflection of the man's beautiful soul.

INDEX

- ADDISON (Joseph), 43, 47-48, 53, 56,
65-66, 71, 76-77, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85,
90, 109 (51), 126, 132, 140, 141,
150, 157, 194, 208, 210.
Adventurer (The), 96.
AESCHYLUS, 50.
AIKIN (John), 128, 134.
ALDEN (R. M.), 130 (8), 178, 197.
ALDINGTON (Richard), 181.
ALLIBONE (S. A.), 159 (26).
American Whig Review, 162.
ANACREON, 3, 44, 87.
ANDERSON (Robert), 96, 157.
Applebee's Journal, 84.
ARNOLD (Matthew), 151.
Athenian Mercury, 29.
Athenian Oracle, 66, 73 (56).
ATTENBOROUGH (J. M.), 129, 175, 187.
AUBREY (John), 57.
AYRES (Philip), 31.
- BACON (Francis), 18, 32, 133.
BAILLET, 71 (51).
BAKER (David), 111-112.
BALZAC (Guez de), 81.
BARNES (Joshua), 63.
BATES (Dr), 13.
BATH (The Marquis of), 4 (8).
BAXTER (Richard), 28.
BEATTIE (James), 116.
BEAUMONT (Francis), 71 (51).
Beauties of English Poetry..., 95.
BEECHING (H. C.), 130 (8).
- BEHN (Aphra), 13, 31, 34.
BELCHIER, « Secretary », 100.
BELL (Robert), 96, 158.
BELLAMY (Sr. and Jr.), 60, 61.
BENNET (Henry), 60.
Bible (The), 19, 131.
Biographie Universelle..., 137 (29).
BLACKLOCK (Thomas), 100.
Blackwood's Magazine, 133, 135, 149
(1), 160 (31).
BLAIR (Hugh), 115, 116.
BLAND (Robert), 128 (5), 136.
BLOUNT (Sir Thomas Pope), 44 (93),
45 (95).
BLOW (John), 26 (16).
BÖDIKER (Johann), 37 (71).
BOILEAU, 42 (85), 96, 97.
BOSCAWEN, 133.
BOSWELL (James), 120.
BOUHOURS (Father), 80.
BOWLES (William), 88.
BOWMAN (Henry), 26.
BRAITHWAITE (W. S.), 130.
BRIGHTLAND (John), 73.
British Anthologies, 130 (8).
British Poets (Selections from the),
129 (6).
British Poets (Specimens of the),
128.
British Poets (The), 128.
British Prose-writers (The), 128.
BROGHILL (Lord), 4-5, 9.
BROME (Alexander), 24.

Figures between brackets refer to the footnotes.

BROWN (Thomas), 60, 62, 63 (16), 68, 75 (64).

BROWNE (Sir Thomas), 141.

BROWNING (Elizabeth Barrett), 153-154, 169.

BRYANT (W. C.), 165, 168.

BRYDE (J. Mac Laren Mac), 175, 176-177, 188.

BRYDGES (Sir Egerton), 132, 136, 164, 206.

BUDGE (Eustace), 65.

HURROUGHS (John), 173.

BURTON (Robert), 141.

BUSBY (Dr.), 95.

BUTLER (Samuel), 29, 141.

BYRON (Lord), 143.

BYSSHE (Edward), 61, 80, 95.

Cabinet of Poetry (The), 128, 134.

CAMPBELL (George), 116.

CAMPBELL (Thomas), 128, 135.

CAREW (Thomas), 45, 197.

CARPENTER (F. I.), 130 (8), 192 (58), 197.

CARTWRIGHT (William), 112.

CARY (Henry), 159.

CASE (A. E.), 88 (92).

CATULLUS, 88 (93), 114.

CAZAMIAN (Louis), 198 (74).

CHABANON (De), 114.

CHALMERS (Alexander), 128, 157.

CHAPELAIN (Jean), 152.

CHARLANNE (Louis), 182 (28).

CHARLES II, 2, 15, 71 (51), 110.

CHARLETON (Dr. Walter), 49.

CHARLETON (William), 27.

CHASLES (Philarète), 158 (24).

CHAUCER (Geoffrey), 13, 14, 37, 47, 109 (51), 111, 151.

Chester Chronicle (The), 123 (89).

CHETWOOD (Knightly), 47.

CHILD (F. A.), 35.

CHRISTINA (Queen), 25.

CIBBER (Theophilus), 108-109.

CLARE (J.), 132.

CLARENDON (Lord), 27, 98, 110.

CLARKE (William), 97.

Classical Journal (The), 133.

CLAUDIAN, 133.

CLEVELAND (John), 10, 57, 71 (51), 74, 141, 152 (13), 172.

CLOUGH (A. H.), 151.

CLOUGH (Ben C.), 200 (77).

COBB (Samuel), 69.

COLERIDGE (S. T.), 138, 139-141, 147, 152.

COLLINS (J. Churton), 175, 185.

COLLINS (William), 69, 167.

CONGREVE (William), 41 (82), 52 (112), 75, 84, 90, 110, 142, 208.

COOPER (C. W.), 130 (8).

CORY (H. E.), 79.

COTTERELL (Sir Charles), 6.

COTTON (Charles), 35.

COTTON (John), 47.

COURTHOPE (W. J.), 174, 187.

COWARD (William), 74.

COWL (R. P.), 181 (25).

COWLEY (Abraham), *Works*.

Anacreontiques, 10, 24, 26, 77 (66), 87, 95, 97, 105, 106, 110, 112, 113, 115, 116, 120, 125, 126, 128, 132, 134, 136, 137, 146, 151, 153, 155, 159, 167, 168, 179, 183, 188, 193, 195, 201, 207, 209.

Age, 97.

Beauty, 65.

Drinking, 27 (18), 33.

Epicure (The), 95 (6).

Grasshopper (The), 152, 191.

Civil War (A Poem on the late), 24, 26 (17), 61.

Dauides, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 19, 27, 30, 32, 33, 38-40, 45, 46, 49, 50, 53, 57, 62, 65, 67, 68, 72, 73, 74, 80, 81, 84, 96, 100, 103, 114, 116, 121, 122, 124, 128, 131, 133, 134, 138, 153, 156, 158, 160, 161, 162 (37), 164 (41), 165, 167, 168, 175, 176-177, 183, 186, 187, 188, 192, 198, 199 (75), 207, 208.

Dauides, 133.

Discourse by way of Vision... (A.), 25, 61, 62, 85, 97, 105, 106 (44), 113 (61), 123 (89), 128, 140 (38), 144 (and note 54), 155, 173, 184 (36).

- Essays*, 16, 20, 27, 46, 64, 65, 66 (35), 87, 91, 95, 96, 99, 102, 105, 106, 111, 112, 113, 119, 122, 123 (89), 125, 126, 128, 129, 134 (19), 139, 151, 155, 159, 166, 173, 179, 185, 186, 188, 193, 194, 195, 201, 208, 209.
- Agriculture (Of), 65.
- Danger of Procrastination (The), 65, 66 (34), 95.
- Dangers of an Honest Man... (The), 95.
- Garden (The), 7, 24, 25, 97, 132 (13), 193, 209.
- Greatness (Of), 66 (35), 95, 105.
- Liberty (Ode Upon), 85, 186 (40), 193, 209.
- Myself (Of), 65, 68, 82 (82), 95, 194.
- Obscurity (Of), 7 (10).
- Shortness of Life... (The), 95.
- Solitude (Of), 65, 95, 132 (13).
- Juvenilia*, 24, 55.
- Poeticall Blossomes, 1, 24, 166.
- Sylva, 1.
- Latin writings*, 16, 20, 44, 72, 112, 113, 132, 136, 140, 143, 162 (37), 186.
- Books of Plants, 24, 25, 27, 28, 44, 94, 95, 96, 111, 131, 132, 133, 134, 156, 186.
- Epitaphium Vivi Auctoris, 65, 95, 143, 156.
- Letters*, 151, 179.
- Miscellanies*, 4, 27, 65, 66 (35), 68, 89, 96 (9), 100, 120, 128, 129, 134 (19), 139, 151, 155, 159, 166, 173, 179, 185, 186, 188, 193, 194, 195, 201, 208, 209.
- Bishop of Lincoln (To the...), 32 (48).
- Chronicle (The), 61, 65, 95, 96, 105, 106, 120, 138, 142, 144 (54), 146 (61), 151, 156, 163, 166, 195, 201, 209.
- Crashaw (On the Death of Mr.), 120, 156, 167, 186 (40), 193, 195, 199 (75), 209.
- Friendship in Absence, 28 (19), 68, 147 (62), 166.
- Hervey (On the Death of Mr. William), 138, 141 (41), 142, 155, 160, 167, 186 (40), 193, 195, 199 (75), 209.
- Jordan (On the Death of Mr.), 103 (34).
- Motto (The), 103 (34), 166.
- Vandike (On the Death of...), 146 (61), 186 (40).
- Wit (Of), 32, 66 (35), 98, 103 (34), 120, 193, 194.
- Wootton (On the Death of Sir H.), 25, 186 (40).
- Mistress (The)*, 2, 4, 5, 10, 15, 17, 20, 26, 27, 33, 40-42, 46, 52, 57, 63, 65, 66 (35), 73, 76, 78, 79, 81, 84, 88, 89, 96, 100, 103, 107, 109, 113, 116, 121, 124, 128, 134, 136, 138, 155, 156, 159, 161, 163, 165, 166, 167, 168, 179, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 193, 194, 199 (75), 201, 202, 207, 208.
- Bargain (The), 66 (35).
- Beauty, 66 (35).
- Concealment (The), 66 (35).
- Change (The), 186.
- Despair (The), 107.
- Given Love (The), 27 (18).
- Heart-Breaking (The), 2 (5).
- Hope (Against), 33, 108 (47), 186 (40), 187, 198.
- Hope (For), 186 (40), 187, 198.
- Inconstant (The), 138.
- Long Life (The), 116.
- Love's Discovery, 2 (5).
- Picture (My), 116.
- Request (The), 116.
- Rich Rival (The), 27 (18).
- Silence, 2 (5).
- Thief (The), 66 (35).
- Tree (The), 7, 116.
- Vain Love (The), 116.
- Waiting-Maid (The), 65, 95 (6).
- Weeping, 116.
- Pindaric Odes*, 3, 4, 10, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 27, 42-43, 46, 48, 49, 51, 52, 57, 66 (35), 73, 75, 79, 85, 88, 89, 91, 96 (9), 100, 103, 109, 111, 113, 115, 116, 117, 121, 124, 134, 136, 137 (29),

- 138, 139, 146, 152, 153, 155,
156, 158, 159, 160, 161, 165,
167, 168, 177, 178, 179, 183,
184, 185, 186, 188, 192, 193,
198, 207, 208.
Brutus, 32, 61, 63 (20), 146 (61).
Extasie (The), 88 (93).
Hobs (To Mr.), 49, 146 (61),
163.
Life, 163.
Life and Fame, 108 (47).
Muse (The), 186 (40).
Olympique ode (The second),
69, 140.
Praise of Pindar (The), 82 (82).
Resurrection (The), 35 (63), 65,
186 (40).
Proposition (A...), 7, 65.
Puritan and the Papist (The), 24,
26 (17), 28, 128.
Theatre.
Cutter of Coleman Street, 6, 7,
24, 62 (12), 106 (44), 122, 134,
138, 142, 146 (61), 164, 185
(36).
Guardian (The), 2, 26 (17).
Loves Riddle, 2, 24, 60, 163, 166.
Naufragium Joculare, 2, 24, 60,
61, 73, 122, 136 (27), 163.
Translations, 16, 44, 146 (61), 201.
Verses Written upon Severall Occa-
sions, 7 (18), 12, 35, 128,
134, 193.
Broghills (Upon occasion of a
copy of verses of my Lord),
1 (1), 4.
Christ's Passion, 7, 69.
Complaint (The), 1 (1), 11, 89,
102, 133, 139, 142, 146 (61),
155, 188.
Light (Hymn. To), 35, 60, 103,
105, 109 (50), 134, 146 (61),
163, 186 (40), 193.
Orinda's Poems (On), 6.
Restoration (Upon his Majes-
ties...), 32 (48), 85.
Royal Society (To the), 49, 103
(34), 146 (61), 150, 156 (18),
163, 186 (40), 194.
Somerset House (On the Queen
repairing), 26 (17), 61, 89.
- Spurious works*.
Character of an Holy Sister
(The), 12 (29).
Foure Ages of England (or, The
Iron Age), 11.
Satyr against Separatists (A.),
11, 12 (29).
COWPER (William), 99, 132, 167.
CRABBE (George), 97, 132.
CRAIK (G. L.), 159.
CRAIK (Henry), 130 (8).
CRASHAW (Richard), 2, 57, 140, 154,
172, 177, 191, 197, 200, 201, 203.
CRESSWELL (Robert), 1.
Critical Review (The), 98, 107 (45),
113, 114 (70), 123 (89).
CROMWELL (Henry), 89 (101).
CROMWELL (Oliver), 25, 85, 113 (61),
173.
CROMWELL (A True and faithful
Narrative...), 61.
CROSLEY (John), 24.
CURRY (J. T.), 174 (4).
CURTIS (A. C.), 129, 183 (33).
- DARWIN (Erasmus), 131.
DAVENANT (William), 6, 7, 29, 38,
113, 114, 141, 189.
— *Gondibert*, 50 (107), 181.
DAVIS (William), 132.
DENHAM (John), 7, 13, 14, 21, 38, 42,
47, 49, 51, 53, 54 (114), 90, 110,
113, 116 (74), 139, 184.
DENNIS (John), 52 (112), 74, 84.
DENNIS (John), 130 (8), 189 (48),
197, 201.
DIBDIN (T. S.), 159.
DISRAELI (Isaac), 7 (14), 68 (41),
131.
DIXON (W. Macneile), 177 (9).
DODSLEY (Charles), 71 (51), 98, 113.
DONNE (John), 9, 18, 38 (71), 41,
45, 49, 52, 57, 71, 78, 81, 82 (80),
83, 104, 110, 116, 123, 131, 134,
140, 142, 143, 146, 147, 150, 151,
154, 159, 172, 175, 180, 185, 189,
190, 192, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199,
200, 202, 203, 204, 207.
DOTTIN (Paul), 66 (35).
DRAKE (Nathan), 112.
DRAYTON (Samuel), 141.

DRECHSLER (Max), 175, 181.

DRUMMOND OF HAWTHORNDEN, 132, 141.

DRYDEN (John), 9, 10 (26), 18, 29, 31, 36, 44 (94), 46, 48-56, 57, 58, 59, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 79, 81, 83, 85, 87, 90, 92, 93, 97, 99, 100, 101, 109 (and note 51), 110, 111, 114, 118, 132, 133, 140, 141, 145, 146, 149, 151, 162, 175, 180, 184, 186, 189, 198, 200, 202, 204, 205, 208.

Dryden's Miscellany, 61.

DU BARTAS, 177.

DUNCAN (C. S.), 182.

DUNTON (John), 60, 62, 63 (16), 64, 66, 71 (50), 84.

DURHAM (W. H.), 79.

EDGEWORTH (R. L.), 131.

Edinburgh Review (The), 145, 159.

ELIOT (T. S.), 175, 200, 203.

ELLIS (George), 96.

ELWIN (Rev. Whitwell), 156, 158.

ELLWOOD (Thomas), 80.

ELYS (Edmund), 20 (37), 40, 53.

Englishman (The), 71 (51).

EPICURE, 49, 66.

ETHEREGE (Sir George), 30.

EURIPIDES, 50.

EVELYN (John), 7, 13, 15, 24, 25, 132, 141, 174.

— (John, the son), 41.

— (Mary, the wife), 174.

FAIRFAX (Edward), 177.

FALKLAND (Lord), 2.

FAWKES (Francis), 113.

FELTON (Henry), 71-72, 81 (79), 84.

FENTON (Elijah), 69.

FEUILLERAT (A.), 188.

FITZGERALD (Edward), 153.

FITZOSBORNE (Sir Thomas), See MELMOTH.

FLATMAN (Thomas), 13, 30, 33, 34, 35, 42.

FLEAY (F. G.), 180.

FLETCHER (John), 14, 71 (51), 142.

FOE (Daniel de), 69.

FONTENELLE, 162 (35).

FOX (A. W.), 175, 185-186, 193.

FRANCIS (Philip), 133.

Frazer's Magazine, 151.

GALLUS (Cornelius), 88 (93).

GARDINER (Samuel), 8, 30.

GARNETT (Robert), 178.

GAYLEY (C. M.), 178, 180.

GEE (Samuel), 182.

GENEST (John), 62 (12).

Gentleman's Magazine, 63, 64, 84 (84), 95, 98, 108, 113, 118 (78).

GERARD (Alexander), 116 (72).

GIFFORD (William), 136.

GILDON (Charles), 41, 78-80, 84.

GILFILLAN (George), 129 (6).

GLANVILL (Joseph), 28.

GOLDSMITH (Oliver), 98, 101, 109.

GOSSE (Edmund), 52 (112), 165-168, 172, 174, 178, 184, 187, 194, 199, 202.

GOUGH (A. B.), 129, 175, 191.

GRANGER (James), 98, 112.

GRAY (Thomas), 97, 98, 100-101, 174 (4), 208.

GREG (W. W.), 180, 194 (66).

GRIERSON (H. J. C.), 130, 198-199, 200 (80), 204, 210.

GRISWOLD (R. W.), 129 (6).

GROSART (A. B.), 27, 60, 129, 143 (51), 151 (8), 173, 174, 175, 183, 185, 186, 187, 193, 204, 207, 208.

Grove (The), 71 (51).

Guardian (The), 78.

HALLAM (Henry), 154-155, 158, 163, 165.

HAMELIUS (Paul), 180.

HAMILTON (William), 69.

HANNAY (James), 156-157.

HARPER (Charles), 23.

HARTE (Walter), 60, 67, 84.

HARTLIB (Samuel), 7.

HARVEY-JELLIE (W.), 189.

HAVELOCK ELLIS, 175, 189, 190.

HAY (William), 95.

HAYLEY (William), 114, 132.

HAYWARD (John), 61.

HAZLEWOOD, 9 (21).

HAZLITT (William), 128, 139, 144-146.

HEADLEY (Henry), 94, 114.

- HEARNE (Thomas), 63.
 HEATH (James), 36.
 HEIDE (Anna von der), 181.
Helicon of Love (The), 129 (6).
 HENLEY (W. E.), 130 (8).
 HERBERT (George), 57, 172.
 HERON (Robert), 113.
 HERRINGMAN (Henry), 12, 13, 15, 23, 24, 56, 59, 94, 209.
 HERVEY (William), 62, 131.
 HERVEY (family), 63.
 HEWINS (E. L.), 30 (37).
 HIGGONS (Bevil), 47.
 HIGGONS (Thomas), 13, 14, 34, 42.
 HIGHMORE (Miss), 66.
 HILL (Aaron), 64, 66, 67, 69, 70.
 HOBBS (Thomas), 6-7, 32, 199.
 HOFMANSWALDAU, 38 (71).
 HOLLIDAY (Carl), 130, 193, 203 (84).
 HOMER, 3, 39, 74 (63), 77, 79.
 HOMER-SMITH, 180, 194 (66).
 HORACE, 3, 13, 16, 24, 50, 74 (63), 87, 104, 110, 114, 133, 207.
 HORNER (Francis), 131.
 HOWARD (Edward), 34.
 HOWITT (Charles), 156.
 HUGHES (John), 69.
 HUME (David), 112-113, 141, 173.
 HUNT (Leigh), 139, 143-144.
 HURD (Richard), 60, 94, 95, 101-108, 111, 112, 119, 125, 128, 137, 138, 147, 201, 206, 209, 210.
 HUTTON (E.), 130 (8).

 JACKSON (Mr.), 26 (16).
 JACOB (Giles), 9 (21), 71, 72, 84.
 JOHNSON (Charles), 60, 73.
 JOHNSON (C. F.), 178.
 JOHNSON (Samuel), 93, 96, 98, 107 (46), 111 (55), 115, 118-124, 127, 128, 131, 134, 136, 137, 139, 140, 143, 150, 157, 162, 174, 188, 190, 191, 201, 206, 208, 209.
 JONES (R. E.), 182.
 JONSON (Ben), 14, 37 (71), 47, 71 (51), 92, 97, 104, 109 (51), 133, 136, 141, 180.
 JORDAN (Thomas), 10.
Journal Littéraire de La Haye, 71 (51).
 JUDSON (A. C.), 174.

 KAMES (Lord), 116.
 KEEPE (Henry), 37.
 KEN (Bp.), 68, 164 (41).
 KENNET (Bp.), 27.
 KER (W. P.), 44 (93), 49-54 (notes).
 KING (Henry), 172.
 KING (William), 25, 28.
 KIPPIS (Andrew), 107 (45), 112.
 KIRSTEN (Rudolf), 10 (24), 177.
 KNOX (Vicesimus), 117, 139.
 KURTZ (B. P.), 178 (16).

 LAIDLER (Josephine), 180.
 LAMB (Charles), 138, 139, 141-142, 143, 147, 164, 194, 206, 210.
 LANDOR (W. S.), 139, 143.
 LANGBAINE (Gerard), 37, 44, 108.
 LANGHORNE (John), 100.
 LEE (Charles), 130 (8).
 LEE (Nathaniel), 29, 31, 44, 110.
 LEGOUIS (Emile), 189, 198 (and note 74).
Leisure Hour (The), 162.
 LISLE (Lord), 7.
Literary Magazine (The), 109 (51).
 LLOYD (David), 36.
 LLOYD (Mary), 130 (8), 193 (62).
 LLOYD (Robert), 99.
 LOACH (J. de), 18.
 LOBBAN (J. H.), 130 (8).
 LOCKE (John), 76.
 LOCKER-LAMPSON (F.), 129 (6).
 LOCOCK (K. B.), 129, 192 (57).
London Gazette (The), 12, 15.
London Magazine (The), 109, 133.
 LONDON (William), 3 (6).
Lover (The), 66 (34), 78.
Loves of the Poets (The), 136.
 LOVIBOND (Edward), 100.
 LOWELL (J. R.), 152.
 LUCAN, 187.
 LUCAS (Hippolyte), 158 (24).
 LYTTLETON (Lord), 96, 97.

 MACAULAY (G. C.), 188.
 MACAULAY (Th. B.), 150-151, 157.
 MACKAY (Charles), 129 (6).
 MACKENZIE (Sir George), 28.
 MALHERBE, 37 (71), 81.
 MARGOLIOUTH (H. M.), 9.
 MARKS (Jeannette), 180.

MARLOWE (Christopher), 141.
 MAROT (Clément), 37 (71).
 MARTIAL, 77, 95, 111, 116.
 MARVELL (Andrew), 9, 141, 172, 203.
 MASON (William), 100.
 MASSINGHAM (H. J.), 130, 197.
 MASSON (David), 174, 184.
 MASTERMAN (J. H. B.), 189, 193.
 MASTERS (Thomas), 7 (15).
 MELMOTH (William), 65.
 MEYNELL (Mrs.), 181 (26), 193.
 MILLER (G. M.), 180.
 MILTON (John), 10, 29, 31, 38 (71),
 39, 53, 64, 66, 68, 71 (51), 74, 77,
 78, 88, 91, 97, 101, 109 (51), 110,
 113, 114, 119, 122, 124, 133, 136,
 140, 141, 150, 155, 162 (37), 164,
 177, 200.
 MINCHIN (H. C.), 129, 185, 194 (65).
 MINTO (William), 163, 181.
Miscellany, being a Collection..., 34.
Miscellany Poems and Transla-
tions..., 34.
 MITFORD (M. R.), 151, 168.
 MONTAGU (Lady), 63.
 MONTAIGNE, 105, 152, 179, 194, 209.
Monthly Review (The), 107, 110, 123
 (89).
 MOORE (Thomas), 152 (13).
 MOORE-SMITH (G. C.), 180, 194 (66).
 MORE (Henry), 166.
 MORGAN (Matthew), 29, 38.
 MORGAN (Thomas), 134 (19).
 MORHOF (D. G.), 37 (71).
 MORLEY (Henry), 129 (and note 6,
 7).
 MULGRAVE (Earl of), 31, 32, 39, 43,
 45, 56, 61, 78, 79, 80, 84, 85 (87).
 MULLINGER (J. B.), 194 (64).

 NEELE (Henry), 160.
 NETHERCOT (A. H.), VIII, 24 (2), 57
 (118, 120), 62 (12), 63 (16), 101
 (30), 123 (89), 139 (31), 175, 178,
 179, 200 (77), 204.
New Academy of Compliments, 61.
 NEWCOURT (Richard), 30.
 NEWTON (Henry), 13, 14.
 NICHOLS (John), 95, 97, 113.
 NICHOLSON (Mr.), 134 (19).
 NICOLL (Allardyce), 180.

NITCHIE (Elizabeth), 177.
North British Review, 156.
Notes and Queries, 98, 100 (28), 174.

 OLDHAM (John), 30, 33, 35.
 OLDMIXON (John), 80-84, 85, 208.
 OLDYS (William), 31.
 ORINDA. Cf. PHILIPS (Katherine).
 ORRERY (Earl of), 13.
 OSBORNE (Dorothy), 5.
 OTWAY (Thomas), 110.
 OVID, 3, 31, 39, 79, 116.

 PALGRAVE (F. T.), 129 (6), 130 (8).
 PARNELL (Thomas), 112, 142, 173.
 PARRY (S. A.), 5.
 PARSON (Philip), 108.
 PASCAL, 82.
 PATTERSON (Samuel), 98 (20).
 PATTISON (William), 68.
 PENNIE (J. F.), 131.
 PENROSE (Thomas), 100.
 PEPPS (Samuel), 7, 13, 15.
 PETRARCH, 14, 41.
 PHILIPS (Katherine), 6, 8, 30, 34.
 PHILLIPS (Edward), 34, 37, 43, 57.
 PINDAR, 3, 13, 31, 36, 42, 43, 47, 52
 (111), 63, 75, 76, 86, 87, 91, 102,
 117, 124, 136, 140, 152, 153, 160,
 161, 177, 178, 187, 192, 207.
 PLATO, 64.
 PLAYFORD (J. and H.), 26.
Poems on Several Occasions..., 69.
Poetae Britannici..., 46 (96).
 POETZSCHE (Erich), 66 (35).
 POPE (Alexander), 66, 67, 68, 87-91,
 92, 93, 96, 102, 106, 107, 109, 120,
 125, 126, 133, 146, 147, 149, 156,
 162, 208, 209, 210.
 POPE (Walter), 8.
 PRAZ (Mario), 200.
Prideaux (The Judgment of Dr...),
 63 (20).
 PRIOR (Matthew), 35, 44, 64, 66, 67,
 69, 110.
 PULLEYN (Octave), 31.
 PURCELL (Henry), 26.

 QUARLES (Francis), 20, 38 (71), 57,
 79.

Quarterly (The), 132-133, 136, 137 (28), 155, 174.
 QUILLER-COUCH (A.), 130 (8).
 QUINCEY (Thomas de), 139, 143.
 RANDOLPH (Thomas), 141.
 RAPHAEL, 64.
 RAWSON-LUMBY (J.), 129.
 REED (E. B.), 192 (56), 193.
 REGGIO (Pietro), 25, 31, 33.
Retrospective Review (The), 136 (27), 137-138.
 REYNOLDS (Myra), 181.
 RHYS (Ernest), 193 (63).
 RICHARDSON (Samuel), 66-67, 107.
 RITSON (Joseph), 95.
 ROCHESTER (Earl of), 27, 29, 33, 35, 54, 79, 139.
 RODOCANACHI (E.), 143 (50).
 RONSARD, 37 (71).
 ROSCOMMON (Earl of), 47.
 ROSEBERRY (Lord), 173.
 ROSSETTI (W. M.), 129 (6).
 ROUSE (W. H. D.), 129.
 ROWE (Nicholas), 62.
 RYMER (Thomas), 37 (71), 39-40, 45, 74.
 SAINT-EVREMOND, 44.
Saint James's Magazine, 160-161.
 SAINTSBURY (George), 80, 119 (80), 130 (8), 154, 174, 180, 181.
 SANFORD (Ezekiel), 128, 135.
 SAVAGE (Richard), 69.
 SCARBOROUGH (Sir Charles), 13, 14 (34).
 SCHELLING (F. E.), 130 (8), 186.
 SCHIPPER (Jacob), 69 (47), 100 (24).
Scot's Magazine (The), 98.
 SCOTT (Sir Walter), 139, 143.
 SELLON (G. B.), 130 (8).
 SENECA, 81, 98, 187.
Session of the Poets (The), 11.
 SHADWELL (Thomas), 31.
 SHAFER (Robert), 177.
 SHAKESPEARE, 3, 10, 14, 46, 47, 92, 92, 97, 101, 109 (51), 110, 141, 159, 193.
 SHARP (William), 178.
 SHAW (Cuthbert), 100.
 SHENSTONE (William), 69, 142.

SHIRLEY (James), 152 (13).
 SIDNEY (Sir Philip), 145.
 SIEVEKING (A. F.), 130 (8).
 SMART (Christopher), 100.
 SHIPMAN (Thomas), 9.
 SKINNER (Thomas), 36.
Somers' Tracts, 128.
 SOPHOCLES, 50.
 SOUTHEY (Robert), 136 (25), 139, 142.
 SPARROW (John), 129, 175, 179, 201, 210.
Spectator (The), 65-66, 67, 80, 84, 87.
 SPEEDE (William), 14 (35).
 SPENCE (Joseph), 60 (1), 84 (84), 87, 90, 98.
 SPENSER (Edmund), 3, 8, 10, 13, 14, 19, 29, 37 (71), 38, 39, 47, 49, 64, 78, 88, 91, 109 (51), 110, 114, 131, 189.
 SPINGARN (J. E.), 43 (88, 89), 174, 180.
 SPRAT (Thomas), 3, 4, 8, 14-21, 23, 27, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38 (71), 40, 45, 46, 72, 96 (10), 108, 117, 118, 151.
 STANLEY (Thomas), 167.
 STATIUS, 88.
 STEBBING (T. R. R.), 162 (36).
 STEBBING (William), 162-163, 166.
 STEELE (Richard), 65-66, 77, 86, 89 (101), 126, 194.
 STEPHEN (Sir Leslie), 185, 196.
 STERNE (Laurence), 114.
 STEVENSON (John Hall), 97.
 STOW (John), 73 (58).
 STRODE (William), 27.
 STRYPE (John), 73.
 STUBBE (Henry), 40, 53.
 STUKELEY (William), 98 (21).
 SUCKLING (Sir John), 11, 41, 49, 71 (51), 83, 180.
 SWIFT (Jonathan), 36, 42, 66, 109 (51), 110.
 SWINBURNE (A. C.), 152.
 SYLVESTER (Joshua), 177.
 TACITUS, 81.
 TAINÉ (Hippolyte), 157-158.
 TASSO, 28, 39, 40, 50 (107), 78, 81, 177.

- TATE (Nahum), 13, 44.
 TEMPLE (Sir William), 5, 7, 28, 36, 157.
 THÉOPHILE, 85.
 THOMAS (Walter), 65.
 THOMPSON (E. N. S.), 179.
 THOMSON (James), 144.
 TIBULLUS, 117.
 TILLEY (A. A.), 129, 179.
Times' Literary Supplement, 201.
 TONSON (Jacob), 60, 94.
 TRAILL (H. D.), 189.
Transproser Rehears'd (The), 28.
 TRENCH (R. C.), 129 (6), 163.
 TROCHEREAU (Yves), 85 (87).
 TUKE (Samuel), 11.

 ULLRICH (Hermann), 182.
 UPHAM (A. H.), 181 (28), 197.

 VAN DOREN (M.), 49 (104), 175, 180, 181, 186, 192.
 VAUGHAN (Henry), 172.
 VILLEMAIN (A.), 158.
 VIRGIL, 3, 6, 10, 13, 28, 31, 36, 39, 44 (94), 47, 49, 50, 51, 54 (114), 63, 74 (63), 77, 79, 80, 111, 177, 207.
 VOLTAIRE, 114.

 WALLER (A. R.), 1 (1), 129, 173, 188.
 WALLER (Edmund), 2, 6, 9, 21, 28, 29, 31, 38, 41, 46, 47, 49, 53, 54 (114), 64, 71, 74, 78, 79, 83, 84, 87, 88, 91, 96, 109 (51), 110, 113, 116 (74), 181, 184, 198, 202.
 WALPOLE (Horace), 150.
 WALSH (William), 33, 36 (65), 41, 52, 53, 78, 81, 90.
 WALTON (Isaac), 25, 141.
 WANLEY (Nathan), 29.
 WARD (A. W.), 163-164, 165.
 WARD (T. H.), 130, 164-165.
 WARD (Dr.), 13.

 WARNER (C. D.), 130 (8).
 WARTON (Joseph), 98, 109-111.
 WARTON (Thomas), 100, 113, 136, 140.
 WARWICK (Earl of), 62.
 WATERHOUSE (Gilbert), 37 (71).
 WATTS (Isaac), 69.
Weekly Intelligencer (The), 2.
 WELCH (John), 159.
 WELLS (H. W.), 200 (77).
 WELSTED (Leonard), 71, 74.
 WERNICKE (Christian), 38 (71).
 WESLEY (John), 95, 97, 106.
 WESLEY (Samuel), 13, 33, 34, 38, 41, 62, 84.
 WEST (Gilbert), 86, 100, 208.
 WHINCOP (Thomas), 73 (60).
 WHITEHEAD (William), 100.
 WILD (Robert), 7 (17), 29.
 WILLIAMS (Orlo), 194.
 WILLIAMSON (George), 175, 202.
 WILLIS (Francis), 24, 34, 44.
 WILLMOTT (R. A.), 162.
 WINSTANLEY (William), 29 (34), 37, 57.
Wit and Loyalty reviv'd..., 24 (5), 32 (48).
 WITHER (George), 79.
Witts Recreations..., 2.
 WOOD (Anthony à), 29, 57.
 WOODFORD (Samuel), 8, 30, 38.
 WOODHULL (Mariana), 177.
 WORDSWORTH (William), 94, 138, 139, 152, 167.
 WORTHINGTON (John), 7.
 WREN (Sir Christopher), 20.
 WYNDHAN LEWIS (D. B.), 130 (8).

 YALDEN (Thomas), 35.
 YARNALL (Emma), 175, 186 (40).
 YART (Abbé), 85-86.
 YOUNG (Edward), 65, 86 (89), 133, 146.

Vu, le 15 Avril 1931.
*Le Doyen de la Faculté des Lettres
de l'Université de Paris,*
H. DELACROIX

Vu et permis d'imprimer
Le Vice-Recteur de l'Académie de Paris,
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